

# The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 69

September 2018

## Captain's Log

There has been less to report since issue No 68 back in June but I attended the rehearsal for the Shipping Festival Service at Winchester Cathedral Thursday the 7th of June.

On the Friday following I attended the Funeral Service of our long-standing member Denis Gore at Southampton Crematorium.

Approximately 240 people attended the shipping Festival Service on Thursday the 14th of June. The weather was kind to us for the drinks and nibbles in the garden after the service. There were a few hiccups relating to the distribution of food, which normally is done by the Sea Cadets, and some of the members wife's. Somehow the Sea Cadets had been instructed that they were not needed, and the food was just placed on the table for people to fill their plates with the result that many did not get any food. Hopefully this matter will be solved next year. It was disappointing not to have anyone attending from Southampton Merchant Navy Association with the exception of myself.

I believe the club has organised this service since 1930 and I wonder how many more years will be needed to get everything running smoothly. I am not the first Captain to discover that my written briefing notes seemed to be in conflict with what was expected when meeting guests at the West Door.

Captain Plumley's charity last year was the Solent Dolphin Charity which, free of charge, takes disabled people, including stroke patients, out on two-hour trips around Southampton Port. I had pleasure in joining Robin on a visit to the *Alison MacGregor* at 22 berth to hand over a cheque for £523 to Nigel Bassett, representing the charity.

I attended our Management meeting Thursday the 21st of June followed by our Entertainments meeting Thursday the 5th of July and then the wash-up meeting to discuss the SFS on Thursday the 12th of July.

I was saddened that due to a long-standing medical appointment I was unable to attend the funeral service for Captain Ian Peterson on the 22nd of June at St Mark's Church in Lymington. However, I was able to give my personal apology to his widow, Jackie, at our recent curry lunch.

On Tuesday the 3rd of July I attended the new Mayor's reception at the Guildhall which was also attended by our Port Chaplain John Attenborough and the CO from Southampton Sea Cadet unit. It was also attended by Denis O'Shea from Southampton Sunday Lunch Project which is a Charity that the Mayor Cllr Steven Barnes-Andrews has nominated as a charity for his year in office and it is also a charity that I have included for my time as club Captain. They serve approximately 200 lunches every Sunday to homeless people and lonely people with no one to talk to. It is a very small charity, but they give a great service to people in need.

Curry lunch at Kuti's located at the Royal Pier was a success and well attended by 37 including guests. Parking facilities there were excellent.

I think that brings an end to this edition of my Log for September with thanks again to everyone who assist with the successful running of the club.

*As well as the Sunday Lunch Club, Captain Pedersen's other chosen charity is the SSAFA but he also has close connections to others. He writes:*

It has been an honour and a privilege for me to be a caseworker for SSAFA for the past four years and a honorary agent for the Shipwrecked Mariners Society in Chichester for the same period.

**The Shipwrecked Mariners Society:** On Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 1838, 11 fishing vessels with 26 men onboard left Clovelly Harbour (North Devon) for nearby fishing grounds. The fleet encountered a ferocious storm, after which only two vessels returned, and 21 men were lost.

Hearing of the tragedy, Mr Charles Gee Jones, a former Bristol Pilot and landlord of the Pulteney Arms in Bath, suggested to Mr John Rye, a retired 'medical man' that something should be done to assist the widows, orphans and parents of fishermen and mariners who lost their lives at sea.

The Society was formerly founded in February 1837. Her Majesty Queen Victoria was its first patron and ever since the Society has been honoured by Royal Patronage.

From 1851 the Society operated lifeboats at Lytham, Rhyl, Portmadoc, Tenby, Llanelli, Teignmouth, Hornsea and Newhaven but it was subsequently agreed that it would be wiser if one organisation concentrated on rescuing lives at sea while the other helped the survivors or their bereaved families and as a result the Society transferred its lifeboats to the RNLI in 1854.

The Society's objective is to give "relief and assistance to the widows and orphans of fishermen; and of members of the Society, who lose their lives by storms and shipwreck on any part of the coast of the United Kingdom, while engaged in their lawful occupations; and also to render necessary assistance to such mariners, soldiers, or other poor persons as suffer shipwreck upon the said coasts"

Over the past year the Society have paid out £1.4 million pounds in grants including support to over 1,500 regular beneficiaries.

I would encourage members of our club to consider donations to this very important charity and perhaps include the Society in their will wherever possible. The Society also benefits from their Christmas Card Appeal and I will leave a catalogue with Richard with a list should anyone wish to place an order for their Christmas cards this year.

**SSAFA (Sailors, Soldiers, Air force & Family Association):**

Over the past four years I have been surprised about the people who do not know what the SSAFA is or what they do. It is the biggest military Charity with over 7,000 volunteers who last year supported over 62,000 services personnel. It is worrying to know that there are so many who are suffering just to ensure that we all can continue to have

our freedom and I am sure many of us never even give it a thought.

In the four years that I have been a caseworker for SSAFA I have assisted 69 families with funding including written off non-priority debt to the value of over £380,000.

I have dealt with suicide, domestic violence, and illness including mental illness where there have been instances where they have ended up in conflict with the law from serving in war torn countries including the Falklands. Some very sad cases but it has given me great satisfaction to assist these people including giving some practical advice.

I have not resigned from the above charities but stepped back during this year as elected Captain for the club. Coming up for 72 years of age in October there is a limit to what I am able to do. I would like to ask anyone to be generous should you come across SSAFA. It is a great Charity and we need our armed forces to keep us safe even more so now with all the turmoil worldwide.

Thank you for the time taken reading about above two charities.

Flemming Pedersen  
Club Captain

*I have seen some of the touching letters of thanks to Captain Pedersen and the SSAFA from those he has helped but there is no room to copy them here... Ed*

## Boatsteerer's Locker

Fellow Cachalots

After the Winchester Shipping Festival Service we took off to the Italian Lake Maggiore for a much needed week's rest and recuperation.

The Festival Service had a few hiccups which I hope will not be repeated next year and many thanks must go to the ladies who provided the mouth-watering canapés and our Sidesmen who performed their duty like well oiled engines and I must not forget our valiant band of members and friends who added to the occasion.

The temperature in Italy was in the low 30s and we brought it back for you all to enjoy and give you something to moan about with the lack of water in your gardens.

One thing I did notice in our hot weather that the men all appeared in shorts while their female companions wore trousers!

We have had to upgrade our office computer system which was badly in need of a revision and fortunately we were left a legacy in the will of a widow of one of our former members which helped towards the cost of our update.

At the last Management Committee meeting it was decided to amend the Joining Application Form comply with GDPR. A note will be in the next Cachalot Newsletter stating that "If members do not agree to their Name, address and contact details, which will never be disclosed for marketing purposes, being recorded on our Membership Data Base, they should advise the Boatsteerer".

Plans are well in hand for the Trafalgar Dinner at the Grand Café, South Western House on 19th October and details may be found elsewhere in this newsletter.

Before I know it we will have the Club Supper, Harpooners Dinner and the Sea Pie Supper upon us, enough for me to start howling at the moon (an engineer's affliction).

You may have noted that the soccer season is once more upon us when the cricket season is nowhere near finished, this cannot be attributed to Brexit or global warming.

Our Club Room Friday get together thoughts go out to those of you who are in ill health or sick, not forgetting Reg. Pretty, Larry Corner, Len Sherriff, Allan McDowall amongst others.

Roll on Christmas, Best wishes

Ken Dagnall

## Trafalgar Dinner

Following the successful event last year and encouragement from some of those who attended, we will be holding a similar event this year at the Grand Café.

The Grand Café is situated at South Western House where many hundreds of Merchant Navy Officers were examined for their Board of Trade Certificates during the last century. Originally the South Western Hotel, it is now an upmarket development of flats and apartments. The Grand Café occupies what was the ballroom on the ground floor.

The function will be a black tie dinner for between 150 and 180 guests, billed as 'The Admiral of the Port's Trafalgar Dinner' and the Admiral, aka the Mayor of Southampton, Cllr Stephen Barnes-Andrews, will be in attendance, together with the Mayoress, Mrs Amanda Barnes.

The event is open to not just Club members but to the maritime community and those with an interest in nautical affairs.

The Toast to The Immortal Memory of Nelson will be given by Commodore Bob Sanguinetti RN who was until recently the CEO and Captain of the Port of Gibraltar and has now taken up the post of CEO of the UK Chamber of Shipping.

The Reception will be held in the beautifully refurbished lobby of South Western House at 1900 and Prosecco, soft drinks and hard-tack will be served.

Sea Cadets from the Southampton unit will be in attendance at the entrance and during the evening you will be invited to support the Southampton Sea Cadets and a Prize Draw to that end will take place after the meal, the prize being a modern signalling and communications device.

There will also be some shanty men to lead you in some traditional shanties and songs.

The ticket price is £50 which has been set to reflect the viability of the event at the lower end of expected attendance, 150. Should we attract a full house, 180, any surplus will be directed to the Captain's charities.

Tables will be rounds of 10, with a couple of 12s. You do not have to raise such a party of course, but we will be pleased if you do so. We will endeavour to satisfy your seating requests.

### Menu

Tomato and Red Pepper Soup, Roast Beef and Lemon Posset.

You will be able to pre-order table wines and drinks direct with Grand Café: [karen@grand-cafe.co.uk](mailto:karen@grand-cafe.co.uk) 02380 339303 and advise them of any special dietary requirements. A wine list is posted on the dedicated Trafalgar Dinner page on our website.

We do hope you can join us for this function and support a worthwhile cause. Tickets are available only through our office: 02380 226155 [office@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:office@cachalots.org.uk) We will require the first and last names of all in your party, as you would wish to see them on the place cards. No pre or post nominals please, there just isn't room on the cards. Also any special dietary requirements so we can cross-check with Grand Café.

There is very limited parking at Grand Café but the College Street car park is very close and current evening charges are £2 from 1800-2400. On-street parking is also £2.

The [dedicated page](#) on our website will be updated as and when necessary.

## Admiral of the Port's Trafalgar Dinner

At Grand Café  
South Western House  
Southampton SO14 3AS

**Friday 19th October 2018**

1900 for 1930

**Black Tie**

**Tickets £50 each**

Available only from

**Southampton Master Mariners' Club**

First Floor, Southampton Royal British Legion Club,  
Eastgate Street, Southampton. SO14 3HB (sae please)

Tel: 023 8022 6155 (Thursday & Friday 1130 - 1430)

Email: [office@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:office@cachalots.org.uk)

Full details on our website: [www.cachalots.org.uk](http://www.cachalots.org.uk)

**In Aid of the Southampton Sea Cadets**

## Coffee & Cakes

(The home-made sort)

**Friday, 5th October  
1100**

**In the downstairs room at the RBL Club**

All money raised will go to help the wonderful work  
done by

## Macmillan Cancer Support

and any donations will be gratefully received.

Tabnabs to taste - or take away



**WE ARE  
MACMILLAN.  
CANCER SUPPORT**

## Sea Pie Supper

**Friday 8th February 2019**

**St. Mary's Stadium**

Tickets go on sale, to members only,  
on a first come, first served basis

**Thursday 8th November**

**£53 for members, £65 for guests**

## Merchant Navy Day Service



Holy Rood Church Southampton  
**Sunday 2nd September, 1200**

The service is arranged by the Solent Branch of  
the Merchant Navy Association and will be  
conducted by Chaplain John Attenborough.

In attendance will be the Mayor of Southampton,  
the Southampton and Netley Branches of the RBL,  
the Southampton Sea Cadets, the SMMC and  
other branches of the MNA.

The Mayor will arrive at 1150.

## Club Buffet Supper

**RBL, Wednesday 5th September, 1900 for 1930**

Downstairs at the RBL and as there will be no  
formal seating there is no restriction on numbers.

Post Captain Robin Plumley MBE will give a talk  
based on his polar experiences,  
**"Worse Things Happen at Sea".**

price **£18** pp, names and numbers to the office  
please, no later than Friday 31<sup>st</sup> August.

## Curry Lunch

**KUTI'S ROYAL PIER**

**Sat 10th NOVEMBER 1200 for 1230**

Mr. Kuti has now moved his Curry operation to the  
newly refurbished Royal Pier venue where 37  
members and guests enjoyed the usual curry feast  
on 11th August.

The last Curry Lunch of the year has been booked  
there again but the price has had to be increased to  
**£16** each to cover an increased cost and the  
gratuity.

But still excellent value and we hope you can join  
us there.



With falling attendances and support for the Christmas Dinner it has been decided to forego the event this year. The cost of a suitable venue proscribes a viable outcome at a reasonable cost.

The less formal Christmas Luncheon is proving more popular.

### Christmas Lunch at the Medbar

**Saturday 1st December  
1200 for 1230**

Join the crowd at the Medbar in Oxford Street, where we will have exclusive use of the upstairs room and you will have the choice of three starters, mains and desserts, all for **£22** per head, to include the gratuity.

A raffle will be held, proceeds to the Captain's Charity.  
Donations of prizes will be appreciated.

### The Hamtun Quest

So what do Cachalots do during the 'dog days' of summer when there is no whaling to be done? Well, they practice rowing of course.

The Hamtun Quest, which took place in Southampton Docks, is a traditional gig rowing competition that has just been invented. Loosely based on the rowing race that took place annually between ABP Pilots and the pilot boat Coxswains, this year's inaugural race involved two teams from the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) taking on a team from ABP. A number of local teams had also indicated an interest, but the race had to be held on 18 August for a number of reasons and weak excuses such as 'summer leave' thinned the field.

The aim was to race Bursledon Gigs from Post Office corner (just beyond the scrap berths on the Test, for those not familiar with the docks), down Southampton Water, round Dock Head, with the finish line in the entrance to Empress Dock. Each gig had a crew of five: four rowers and a coxswain to shout encouragement. After the mandatory safety briefing – the race did involve the MAIB after all – the boats were towed to Post Office corner by ABP patrol launches, the crews boarded, and at around 1800 the race started.

The two MAIB gigs set off at a cracking pace, but someone appeared to have replaced the ABP gig's oars with sticks, so their progress was more sedate. Even so, after nearly an hour of hard rowing during which speeds of nearly 5 knots were recorded, all three boats made it to Empress Dock where Southampton Shipowners put on a BBQ for teams and supporters at the Whitaker Tankers berth.

There was one small query about the sense of holding a BBQ at a tanker berth, but the MAIB pointed out that they were only interested in accidents afloat, so everyone relaxed and enjoyed the post-race celebrations.

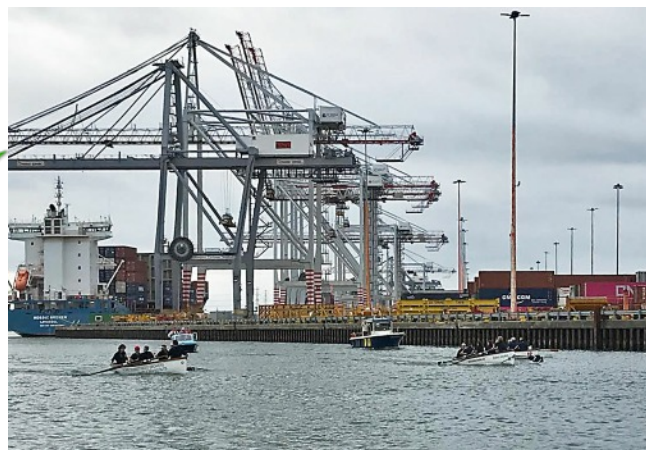
The following Cachalots need a name check: Emma Tiller and Martin Phipps, for making the race happen; and, Ashley Jenkins and Nick Jeffery for the BBQ. Thanks are also due to all the rowers and supporters who made the event fun. The race was a charity event and all funds raised will be donated to Southampton Sea Cadets.

Andrew Moll



### Captain's Charity Donation

Post Captain Robin Plumley MBE, chose SOLENT DOLPHIN as his charity for his year in office and is shown here, with Captain Pedersen and Cachalot Ken Edwards, presenting a cheque for £523 to Nigel Basset and the volunteer crew of the *ALISON MacGREGOR* at 22 berth on the 15th June.



Hamtun Quest - the start



The winners cross the finishing line



Martin Phipps presenting to the winning team

## User views on autonomy

**Lloyd's List Viewpoint 24 May 2018**

*with kind permission of LL and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey*

Are we ever going to see the “maintenance-free” ship? It was a phrase much used in Japan during the 1980s, when the Japanese shipbuilding industry was looking for that technological lead that might persuade owners to order ships from their starving shipyards. A great deal of research went into the subject, most notably in the areas of main machinery and auxiliaries, but also in coatings that would keep corrosion at bay. I can recall attending a presentation in Tokyo at which some of the exciting work on ceramics, promising much reduced wear in machinery, was revealed. That was nearly forty years ago, but while there is no doubt that modern machinery is a lot more reliable than that of this earlier era, we are still a great way off the goal of a ship that can be packed off to the ends of the earth and back, with no human intervention in the maintenance department. And the Japanese, who are nothing if not realists, have noted that if you are going to build advanced ships, they still have to be affordable to the potential customer base.

I thought of these matters, looking at some of the material that is being currently before the IMO Maritime Safety Committee as its members consider their “regulatory scoping exercise” for autonomous ships. I guess it is important to consider the regulatory background under which these disruptive technologies might be introduced, before they start appearing and frighten those operating conventional ships to death. There are already cautionary lessons from the introduction of driverless cars on the public roads.

The distinguished IMO delegates to the MSC will have plenty to consider, in the various interventions that have been produced for the meeting. Should we be slightly concerned at the amount of governmental enthusiasm for autonomy, with several maritime nations already declaring that they see this as the means of establishing a leading role for their own industries? In almost all of these cases it is the manufacturers who are making the running and pushing ahead with their important research, encouraged by funding. And yet, the people who will buy these products, whenever and wherever they eventuate, seem markedly cool about these opportunities. Might their reservations about affordability be behind these reservations?

If you are looking for a notably objective view on the future of what are to be known as “maritime autonomous surface ships”, it is worth looking at the paper that has been produced by the International Federation of Ship Masters Associations and the International Transport Workers Federation. It consists of comments on the issues that need to be thought through, as the way forward for the regulatory oversight of these ships is considered. Don't dismiss this as trade unionists being obstructive to progress – it is packed with common sense, produced by people not who make this stuff, or research it, or even buy it. These are the views of experienced mariners and engineers who operate the ships of today, and their ideas are crucial.

There is also a very fine discussion of the issues that has been produced as a result of a survey of members of the UK/Netherlands/Swiss officers' union Nautilus, which is worth reading for the clarity it brings to the basic issues. There is a telling comment from a senior engineer officer who notes that he has never sailed on a ship in which there was not some sort of breakdown that required on-board intervention, every two days. This is the real world of commercial shipping circa 2018, which brings us back, with a bump, to the 40 year old “maintenance-free” debate. The IFSMA-ITF paper notes that we need to be clear about what it is we mean by our definitions and the various gradations of autonomy between the robots being in charge and automation helping out the humans. It may not be easy to fit particular ships into the various categories.

The AI people may bridle at the doubts that a remote operator ashore with all manner of sensors “can attain the same level of situational awareness and safety as an on-board operator monitoring the same displays”. But I bet there is scarcely a professional afloat who would disagree. And the joint paper emphasises that the issues go far beyond navigation and the suggestion that the ship's main propulsion, auxiliaries and fuel, lubrication and cooling are expected to operate for extended periods without on board crew to maintain them. They point out that small unmanned craft operating in coastal waters of a state cannot be merely extrapolated to large international vessels. Caution is advocated, despite the pressures from aspirational manufacturers, being hurried along by the maritime media. We shouldn't rush to regulate, before we know what we are regulating.

This useful discussion paper asks whether instead of going all out for autonomous systems it might be more sensible at this stage to focus upon their role in increasing efficiency, the reduction of emissions and pollution, accident prevention and safety. It would make a lot more sense, but I fear there will be no stopping the scientists.

And in passing, as I note that Carnival has opened its all-singing and dancing operations centre in the US, it might not be premature to examine the role and responsibilities of those on board, if their every action is to be micromanaged from ashore. IMO could do with a bit of regulatory scoping in this area, perhaps?

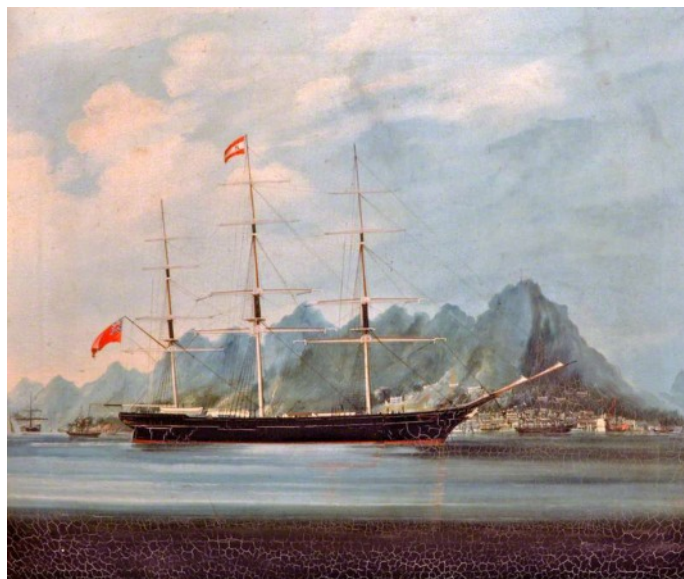
*rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk*



## Lost vessels and saved treasure

Old hands may remember a series of articles published here some 11 years ago, from *Cachalot* 23, March '07 to *Cachalot* 31, March 09, which covered the history of Past Captain Ian Thomson's seafaring forebears, namely Robert Thomson and his son George. Robert was master of the clipper *Skawfell* throughout her career with Rathbones from 1857 to 1871. The painting, right, by Lai Sung, was donated by the Thomson family to the Merseyside Maritime Museum, together with many of the more interesting letters (from a maritime point of view) that the father and son had written home during their careers. Ian had kept the 'domestic' letters and recently unearthed a couple more letters which also paint very interesting pictures themselves and may be of interest to us.

Prior to the *Skawfell* Robert had been master of the *Cathaya*, from 1855 -1857. She is variously described as a barque and a full-rigger and, according to *The Ship's List* she was built in 1850 for Lamport & Holt at 407 tons and rebuilt in 1852 to 503 tons so perhaps that accounts for the change of rig. She was lost at sea in 1857 and the letter below sheds some light on her fate but raises an intriguing mystery.



'Skawfell' off Hong Kong

*Hong Kong 1st November 1858*  
Capt. Thomson,  
Ship "Skawfell".  
Dear Sir,  
Being desirous of expressing our appreciation of the service rendered by you to the Insurance Office of which we are the general agents, in saving from the wreck of the "Cathaya" in October 1857 and bringing in to Hong Kong, under circumstances of considerable peril, a large portion of the treasure which had been shipped in that vessel, then under your command, we have now on behalf of the shareholders in the said Office to request your acceptance of a gratuity of £100, and we beg at the same time to tender our warm acknowledgements of the conduct displayed by you on the occasion in question.  
We enclose herein our draft on Messrs Matheson & Co. in your favour at sight for the above amount and remain, dear Sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
Jardine Matheson & Co.  
General Agents "Canton Insurance Office"

*Hong Kong*  
1st November 1858  
Capt Thomson  
Ship "Skawfell"  
Dear Sir,  
Being desirous of expressing our appreciation of the service rendered by you to the Insurance Office of which we are the general agents, in saving from the wreck of the "Cathaya" in October 1857 and bringing into Hong Kong, under circumstances of considerable peril, a large portion of the treasure which had been shipped in that vessel, then under your command, we have now on behalf of the shareholders in the said office to request your acceptance of a gratuity of £100, and we beg at the same time to tender our acknowledgements of the conduct displayed by you on the occasion in question.  
We enclose herein our draft on Messrs Matheson & Co. in your favour at sight for the above amount and remain dear sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
Jardine Matheson & Co.  
General Agents "Canton Insurance Office"

So, what befell the *Cathaya* and where? Were they rescued by another vessel or did they make their own way to Hong Kong? What were the 'circumstances of considerable peril' that Robert Thomson overcame to bring the treasure there? What was the treasure? One could hardly abandon a foundering vessel humping bars of gold bullion with one. If it was fine jewellery or precious stones that he held in his personal care would he not be expected, as master, to keep it close and deliver it anyway? "A large portion" would seem to indicate that the whole was more bulky than a packet of diamonds. From the tone of the letter and the size of the gratuity, around £12,000 in today's money, the insurers were mightily pleased to recover it. Perhaps the gratuity was a reward for his honesty.

There is little to be found on the 'net and I expect the answer may lie in letters that Robert may have written home at that time and would now be in the Merseyside Maritime Museum. Unless there is somebody out there who can investigate further we may have to approach the museum for more information.

The previous articles on Ian Thomson's forebears can be found on our website under Club Journal / "The Cachalot", or those reading online can click [here](#) All previous editions of *The Cachalot* can be found in the members only section.

The other letter was written by George Thomson in 1883 when he was on the *Sierra Estrella*. He had been at sea just seven years so was probably mate or second mate then.

*Ship 'Sierra Estrella'*  
*Is. of St Vincent*  
*Cape de Verdes*  
*Feb 28th 1883*

My dear Mamma,

You will be surprised to hear from me so soon. We are now about thirty miles from the Island & shall be there by morning, when we shall anchor. When I last wrote by the pilot we were off .????? & ever since then we have had one ceaseless gale of wind until the 21st of Feb. On the 14th we picked up with a distressed Norwegian barque at daylight & ran down to her. We found she was leaking badly & also lost her rudder & the crew wanted to leave her. The weather was moderate with a heavy sea but no break from it, so we got them all on board in about three hours, eleven hands all told. That same night she went down. We were hove to all night for it blew something frightful. That was in Lat 47deg N Long 11 deg W. the only thing that was lost was a large Newfoundland dog & the old skipper of the barque would not let him come in the boat in case the barque lasted out till fine weather & was picked up but there was no fear of that for she sank like a stone in less than 24 hours after.

We were going to land the crew at Madeira but we ran past there in a heavy gale under lower topsails so we are now going to land them on St. Vincent.

We have now 32 men living in the forecabin, our own men, barques' crew & five stowaways so we are pretty well manned.

Captain Murdoch told me the other day that he read in the paper the day we left of a barques' crew being picked up in exactly the same position as the one we picked up. Her name was the "Scawfell" formerly belonging to Rathbone Bros & Co. and the smart passage from China was in the paper too. He says he remembers reading about the passage in the paper when he was a boy, so now you will know where the old "Scawfell" has gone.

8a.m. Mar 1st.

We are now in sight of St Vincent. It has been calm all night. This morning we signalled a barque bound for Sydney. She is also going to call at St Vincent to land her English Channel pilot as she could not land him before through the weather, so we are not the only unfortunate ones.

2p.m. we are now entering the harbour. I don't know whether we shall anchor.

With dearest love to all & wishing you all many happy returns of your birthdays.

I remain your affectionate son

Geo B Thomson

Notes by IBT;

The 'smart' passage from China was Whampoa to Liverpool (Capt R.Thomson, 88 days, arr. Liverpool 11th April 1861) The *Scawfell* was first owned by Rathbone Bros. of Liverpool, and then was sold to Wilson & Blain of South Shields in 1872, then W.Hutchinson of Newcastle in 1880. She was abandoned at sea in a force 12 storm on the 9th January 1883, at 47.30N 11.10W, her pumps having become blocked by the coal cargo.

From the Times newspaper, Weds. 31st January, 1883, page 6:

Captain Kane of the barque *Rosedale*, of Belfast, reports that on the 9th inst. he rescued the master and crew of the barque *Scawfell*, which was then in a sinking condition. Subsequently the rescued crew were transferred to a German vessel, and thence to the ship *Norwhal*, which has landed them at ..?????

George does not mention the name of the Norwegian barque but it was a common thing and the lucky ones were those that were sighted by other vessels. And how coincidental that she foundered in just about the same spot that his father's old vessel had done just one month previously.

We don't know where the *Sierra Estrella* was bound but I assume she was outward bound from Europe and I wonder where the five stowaways thought they were going.

As a retired pilot I am familiar with over-carrying although it never happened to me. It is reputed that the choice pilots for the liners outward bound from Southampton to the States would sometimes get over-carried but they always seemed to have their dinner jackets with them when they did! But to end up off the west coast of Africa is a bit much - he must have been worrying that he might fetch up in South Africa or even Sydney itself!



**Sierra Estrella**

Picture: State Library of South Australia PRG 1373/8/96



## The Seafarers' Friend.

In April 1946 the 10,000 ton Empire Victory type "GOOD HOPE CASTLE" was on passage from Trinidad to Capetown and the two Cadets ( of which I was one) were on daywork - chipping, red-leading and repainting the outboard weather-deck scuppers, from forward to aft, port and starboard. We sat on boxes, facing the guard-rails, gazing at a tranquil ocean where nothing seemed to happen other than an occasional flying fish. THEN, one afternoon, as we were enjoying the cooling trade wind, "Rocky" (my fellow Cadet) suddenly exclaimed " Hey ...look at that - we have company" and I immediately saw a huge bird gliding effortlessly alongside the ship. We both recognised it as an albatross and this was borne out by the Boatswain — Charley Thornback — who had come to check our work output. Mr. Thornback was one of the most senior Boatswains in the company but his lack of "social graces" and a tendency to use "strong" language when provoked precluded his appointment to a passenger mailship. The bird maintained its position alongside us with only an occasional movement of its huge wings ....then ...after scrutinising us for about five minutes ..it glided down towards the sea and immediately soared up and up until it fell astern. As we continued chipping, our new friend took up a position astern and weaved and glided with very little wing movement.

Seven o'clock next morning saw us resume our chipping and painting and, almost immediately, the albatross appeared alongside us, and after a few minutes scrutiny, took up its position astern and spent the day gliding ahead of the ship, then dropping astern and all with very little wing movement. This carried on for some five to six days but then - two days before we arrived in Capetown — it disappeared, and we could concentrate on finishing our tedious task. It had aroused great interest aboard the ship and many stories of similar sightings were recalled by the Officers during mealtimes. The ship had accommodation for twelve passengers (and sometimes more if the DEMS accommodation was used) and they too took numerous photographs and asked many questions.

A few hours after arrival Capetown the Port Meteorological Officer boarded and I was instructed to show him our meteorological logbooks ( we were an "Observing Vessel") and I told him of our experience with our albatross — and the interest that its apparently effortless flight had engendered aboard the ship. It was soon apparent that he knew a very great deal about these creatures and was more than happy to talk about them.

Much of what follows comes from the rough notes I made during our long conversation and which I unearthed a few weeks ago when rummaging in the loft, supplemented by a more recent reference to the reliable "Google"!

The wandering albatross has a body length of about 53 inches and an average weight of some 20 lbs. Seagulls rarely tip the scales at more than 2 lbs. Nautical history indicates that the bird was almost sacred and, in later years, no seafarer would ever kill one deliberately and the killing of one began the unhappy train of events in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner". The bird has a prodigious appetite and is always hungry to such an extent that it will invariably grab a bit of meat or bread tied to the end of a line .If this results in it landing on the deck of a ship it is invariable "seasick" and will divest the contents of its stomach on its new surroundings. Once on deck and without wind below them to afford "lift off" they are unable to take off — and such is the strength of their wings that anyone attempting to assist them risked serious injury. The birds seek the land only during the breeding season and then chiefly on the isolated islands of the Southern Ocean.

It is not uncommon for an albatross to follow a steamship for some two thousand miles -and one was recorded as having "tailed" a fast steamer for three thousand miles and another for six consecutive days without a break. During that time it was seen to fly constantly during the hours of daylight, and the Watchkeepers reported occasional sighting during the hours of darkness suggesting that it did not sleep by alighting on the water. Seafarers have long been fascinated by the sight of an albatross following in the wake of their ship at the same distance and at the same height,with only an occasional wing movement, day in day out. Initially the scientists of that era declared that the bird was held in the air by the energy drawn from the ship's engines. Behind every fast steamship there is a "funnel" of moving air and one wrote " The lazy bird poises itself on the peak of this funnel and allows itself to be pulled along — like a boy hanging on the back of a lorry"! Some years later it was thought that their amazing stamina could be attributed to the birds use of "dynamic soaring" and "slope soaring" to cover great distances with very little physical exertion, (aided by their immense wingspan which can reach 15 feet). Dynamic soaring involves repeatedly rising into wind and descending downwind (gaining energy from the vertical wind gradient) with energy used only in the top and bottom turns of every loop. It has been calculated this allows flight of about 1000 kilometres a day without a flap of the wings ! Slope soaring uses the rising air on the windward side of large waves which, combined with their high glide ratios, means that every metre they drop they can then travel forward for 22 metres. Their soaring is aided by a shoulder lock - a tendon that locks the wing when fully extended



Photo from Wikipedia,  
credit JJ Harrison (jjharrison89@facebook.com)



thus not necessitating any muscular expenditure. They combine these techniques with the use of predictable weather systems. The birds in the Southern Hemisphere flying North will adopt a clockwise route and those flying South will fly counterclockwise. They rest on the water (in calm seas) until the wind picks up allowing them to take off without too much exertion. Some use a technique called flap-gliding where the bird progresses using bursts of flapping followed by gliding.

They are to be found mainly in the Southern Hemisphere (Antarctica, Australia, S.Africa and S.America) and in the North Pacific from Hawaii to Japan, California and Alaska. They avoid the Doldrums as these areas would entail sustained "flapping" and energy expenditure. There is one exception to this and the "Waved Albatross" inhabits the equatorial waters around the Galapagos Islands because of the cool waters of the Humboldt Current and the resulting winds. There is evidence that they once lived in the North Atlantic and some attribute their disappearance to the rising sea levels resulting from interglacial warming.

Wandering albatross react strongly to bathymetry, feeding only in waters deeper than one thousand metres and scientists have been astounded by their rigid adherence to this with one remarking "They appear to have their own "No Entry" signs.! Until recently it was thought that they were solely "surface feeders" but more detailed studies revealed that some species can dive to a depth of 12.5 m. in search of refreshment. These amazing birds live much longer than other birds and delay breeding for longer, reaching sexual maturity slowly and can delay breeding for up to ten years thereafter. The birds are "colonial" usually nesting on isolated islands and then returning to their own point of origin to breed. Most species survive for more than 50 years but one was recorded as having a lifespan of some 66 years.

Undoubtedly these remarkable creatures will continue to entertain and intrigue those who cross the oceans of the globe and, no doubt, more of their secrets will be revealed.

CRK 17/7/18

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*With three 'Viewpoints' in this edition we are at risk of becoming a branch of Lloyd's List but I must squeeze in this latest from Michael Grey: his own take on the silly season. Silly not to, really...Ed*

## The summer scene

### **Lloyd's List Viewpoint 23 August 2018**

*with kind permission of LL and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey*

It has been a disappointing summer, thus far. By this time, most years, when proper correspondents are on route to their Tuscan villas, busying themselves with their travel horror stories, after being given a hard time by an economy airline, we have had at least one *Titanic* story and a new theory on the Bermuda triangle, to help fill the August pages.

There were a few routine tales of strange sea creatures glimpsed off Cornish beaches, deadly sting rays sighted on the Sussex coast, lured up Channel by the warm water and the heatwave and a poisonous gas scare at Eastbourne, which was blamed on the French rather than a passing chemical tanker. Phew.

There have been a few tales from the Far North, with the warmists triumphantly pointing to the melting ice and the increasing access to Arctic waters. British parliamentarians with a penchant for defence were issuing stern warnings about Russian influence in these warming northern waters, suggesting that both the UK and Europe were signally ill-prepared, as Mr Putin reinforces his naval power in this region. The Russians are also building icebreakers with enthusiasm, perhaps because they do not subscribe to the fashionable view that all the ice will be gone in a few years. The US, concerned at all this Russian polar hegemony, has at last got some funding for at least one replacement heavy icebreaker, but it will be years before it is breaking ice, such is the glacial pace of US military procurement processes.

Meanwhile, the Canadian Government has used the depressed offshore market to their advantage by purchasing three newish, ice strengthened and very powerful anchor handlers which Davie Shipyard will convert into government icebreakers. They describe this as an "interim" solution to their icebreaking requirements, but at about a quarter of what it would cost their taxpayers to build from new, it is surprising that other navies have not scouted around for what attractive offshore industry bargains might be available. It wouldn't be a bad notion to lay in a few bargain ships while they stay cheap, as these desperate times won't last for ever.

The demolition of redundant offshore units has been growing apace as their owners resign themselves to the likely scenario that they will never work profitably again. Charterers demand the latest bells and whistles, low fuel economy and 2018 environmental performance. But the offshore sector is not alone in this situation as the big liner companies become increasingly selective, with a large number of container ships, which fail to come up to expectations, condemned to a short life and a not very merry one.

The Arctic was also the focus of deep distress when it was revealed that some blighter off one of those "expedition" cruise ships had shot a polar bear that was threatening to dine off some of the passengers. "Conservationists" (is this not a word which causes the heart to sink?) were outraged, leading any reasonable person to conclude that they would much rather the passengers had been eaten, than the bear killed. My wife said it had a worrying resemblance to a former British Foreign Secretary, as it lay dead on the beach.

There was an immediate debate about whether these specialist cruise ships should be prohibited from anywhere they might wish to cruise, led, of course by the sort of lunatics who want to see carnivores re-introduced to Northumberland forests. I don't believe there are any plans to re-wild Scottish glens with polar bears, as they would probably eat the reintroduced wolves, but you never know.

Another threatened species, along with polar bears, wolves and shipbrokers, the latter being, not for the first time, menaced by technology, are ships' agents. The traditional role of the ship's "Mr Fixit" suffers from fewer demands upon the agent's services, agents simultaneously acting for the owner and charterer (which inevitably leaves the ship disadvantaged), and shorter port stays. There is probably an agency "app" for charterers' smartphones available that will claim to provide complete service at the touch of a button. It is difficult to conceive of a device which will spring the boatswain from gaol, fix the master's toothache, pay off three ABs and sort out the need for fresh veg. the delivery of half a tonne of engine room spares and two thousand tonnes of bunkers. The technologists will surely be working on providing this and more.

But who was not enthused by the linkage between Wilhelmsen Ship Services and Airbus Industries to provide an unmanned drone operation for ships waiting off Singapore, whose port authority are enthusiastic about the idea? I imagined a sort of civilian Reaper with a spare turbocharger slung underneath it, but it is probably a bit more modest, transporting small parcels and that missing chart for ships just pausing awhile. It will be cheaper and quicker than a launch, we are told, although it won't be much use for the Captain who wants a quick game of golf.

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## A shot in the foot

**Lloyd's List Viewpoint 26 July 2018**

*with kind permission of LL and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey*

It could be the shot in the arm a post Brexit Britain needs, nearly £1bn worth of shipbuilding orders to promote something of a renaissance in shipbuilding. But played a different way, with the orders for three Fleet Solid Support ships to support the capital ships of the Royal Navy going overseas, it would amount to a humiliating shot in the foot.

As if we didn't have enough to argue about on the political front in the UK right now, this argument looks like becoming a hot topic as the year progresses, with the MoD anxious to progress the procurement process. Already shipbuilding unions, along with their allies in Westminster have made it known that there is no way that this contract will be allowed to go quietly abroad. And unlike the previous order for replenishment tankers, which were ordered in South Korea, when no British firms were prepared to even tender, there are expected to be three eager domestic contenders for the business; Babcocks, BAe and Cammell Laird.

There will be forceful arguments around the need for an international tender, as the vessels are technically merchant ships, along with reminders that nothing other than warships have been built in UK yards for almost three decades. Why venture into unexplored shipbuilding territory to test local capabilities, when there are plenty of proven large-scale shipbuilders, with experience in constructing major naval auxiliaries? Highly competitive prices will doubtless be on offer.

But this time around, there will be plenty of voices calling for the orders to be placed domestically, citing the capabilities of shipbuilders which together managed to build HMS *Queen Elizabeth* and her sister carrier at a major facility in Rosyth, which ought to be able to assemble modules for three RFAs. There will be those pointing to the revival of shipbuilding in Birkenhead, with the ongoing construction of the research ship *Sir David Attenborough*, launched earlier this month and due for completion next year. Keeping it in the family will give some effect to the shipbuilding strategies devised by Sir John Parker, and accepted by government last year.

Local employment, the husbanding of specialist shipbuilding skills and the strategic importance of such capabilities will all be emphasised to the government. And with the UK due to leave the grim oversight of Brussels next year, the case for domestic orders, even restrictions on overseas tendering, assumes an almost totemic importance. And surely, the technicality of an armed ship built to naval specifications, being termed a merchant vessel, because it suits the suits of the MoD, is almost semantic and fools nobody.

It might be suggested that there are alternatives that both camps could possibly be persuaded to accept. Might the hulls of the three ships be constructed in one of the overseas yards which specialises in steel fabrication, thence being brought home to the UK for fitting out? Substantial economies might be provided in such a fashion. There is, after all, nothing very special about a merchant ship hull, once the lines have been drawn.

There might even be valuable lessons learned from Canada, where the Royal Canadian Navy, desperate for a fleet auxiliary after a fire on one of their ageing ships, bought itself a medium-sized container ship and successfully converted it at the Davie Shipyard. HMCS *Asterix*, which is described as an "interim" solution to the navy's long term needs, nevertheless appears an excellent buy, both in terms of the speed of execution and the cost of the deal to the Canadian taxpayer.

Surely, if pressed, the UK government's shipbroker could come up with a long list of suitable container ships, barely run-in by one careful owner, which would be available at exceedingly attractive prices, bearing in mind the churning taking place as a result of the entry into service of giant ships. A well-built, robust, sea-kindly hull, adaptable for all sorts of configurations and with a high service speed, is surely something that could be built on by UK yards, which have a decent record at ship-conversions. And if you go back a little further, the United States, looking to modernise its Military Sealift Command in the 1970s and 80s, positively plundered the commercial market for containerships and ro-ros, which became the basis for all sorts of enterprising conversions.

Let's face it, if you have the hull and machinery done and dusted as a basis for development, then you only have to argue about the fitting out and additional equipment. It is difficult to believe that there would not be substantial savings to be made, in both time and money, although Admirals would be quick to point out that the navy never believes in cheaper alternatives to anything, even when they don't work.

But let us wait and see how the arguments, which will surely be fierce, pan out in the next few months. If you believe that there is a case for the UK actually making things, and rebuilding expertise in marine technology, then the ships ought to be built here. And if we postponed the contract placement until March and we have ceremonially left the regulatory grip of the EU, the way for a domestic order, surely, might be made a little smoother.

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# STRICK LINE - THE STORY OF A CARGO SHIP COMPANY AND ITS TRADE

(Part II of an article written for the Warsash Association magazine All Hands by Barry Peck)

In many areas Stricks post-WWII were in the forefront of the British merchant navy for fitting the latest technology of the time for most things. On the bridge they had gyro compasses and radar well before many other companies, and to aid the discharge at the considerable number of Gulf ports called at on an average voyage the Chief Officer had a Ralston stability calculator. Into the 1960s automation in the engine room and on deck was normal. Safety equipment was always maintained at the highest level. Air conditioning for the entire accommodation started in 1956, though the earlier post-war ships had it in the public rooms. The one navigation aid they would not fit was the Decca Navigator, which considering that the Arabian Gulf had better coverage than most areas of the world and frequently had poor visibility was a strange omission.

During the period 1947 to 1970 Strick Line ships built four basic vessel designs, reflecting the patterns to be found in general cargo vessels worldwide, although within those four there were variations in layout and size in classes or individual ships. Between 1947 and 1950 propulsion was steam reciprocating engines, all with an exhaust turbine except one, steam auxiliaries, hatch beams and boards, and most had funnels too short when built, which were extended later to keep the smuts off the decks. Between 1953 and 1959 propulsion changed to motor engines but still with Scotch boilers and steam auxiliaries, and still with hatch beams and boards. From 1953 onwards all Strick built ships had Doxford opposed-piston diesel engines. Between 1959 and 1963 the auxiliaries changed to diesel generators with electric winches and manually operated McGregor hatches. Finally, from 1965 to 1970 deck auxiliaries were electric winches, cranes and hydraulically operated McGregor hatches, and the ships had main engine bridge control and an engine room control room with UMS capability. The first of this type, the *Shahristan*, was featured in The Motor Ship magazine in 1965 as having the most advanced engine room in the British merchant navy. All the motor ships from 1953 onwards, except for one, survived until the P&O merger in 1972.

The first group of ships, built between 1947 and 1950, were *Nigaristan*, *Tabaristan*, *Registan*, *Albistan*, *Armanistan*, *Goulistan*, *Muristan* and *Tangistan*. *Albistan* was notable as not being to Strick design as she had been ordered by an Australian company from Shorts of Sunderland, who then sold her to Strick while still building. With the need for larger heavy lift capacity *Nigaristan* had a 140 ton derrick and *Tabaristan* had a 150 ton.

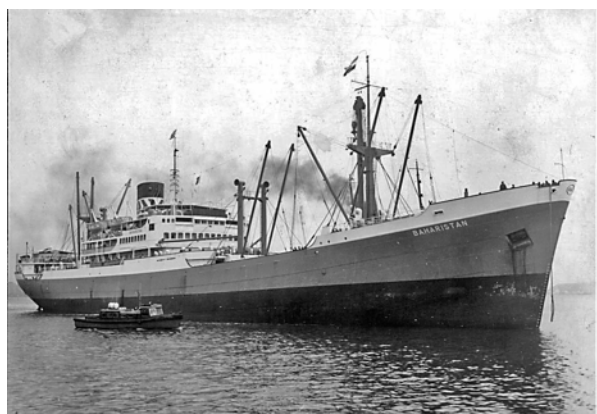


*Tangistan* 1950 - 1972



The third *Tabaristan* 1947 -1968

The second group, built between 1953 and 1959, were *Baltistan*, *Khuzistan*, *Baluchistan*, *Seistan*, *Karaghistan* and *Baharistan*. *Seistan* was tragically lost in 1958 on only her second voyage in a massive explosion in Bahrain that was Stricks' worst peacetime tragedy and must rate very high in the list of peacetime tragedies in the British merchant navy, with 57 dead, including four on a tug alongside.



*Baharistan* 1959 - 1972



The ill fated *Seistan* 1957 -1958

By 1959 Strick Line owned a total of 25 ships, but increasing competition from around the world for the Gulf trade meant this was too many, and in the period 1959 to 1963 all the surviving pre-war and wartime vessels had reached the end of their economic lives and were scrapped or sold on. In addition, the 1950 built *Goulistan* was prematurely scrapped in 1962 due to economically unrepairable engine room damage. By 1963 the total was down to 17, however these were all relatively modern vessels for the time, all dating from 1947 onwards.

The third group, built between 1959 and 1963, were *Farsistan*, *Kohistan*, *Gorjistan* and *Turkistan*. The first three were near identical sisters, while *Turkistan* was the first to adopt the three quarter aft layout that was then becoming the norm for general cargo ships.

During the period 1964 to 1968 the remaining steamships were disposed of, with the exception of two reliable ships, *Albistan* (scrapped 1971) and *Tangistan* (who arrived at the scrapyards the month of the sale of Stricks to P&O), both therefore spending their entire lives under the Strick flag.

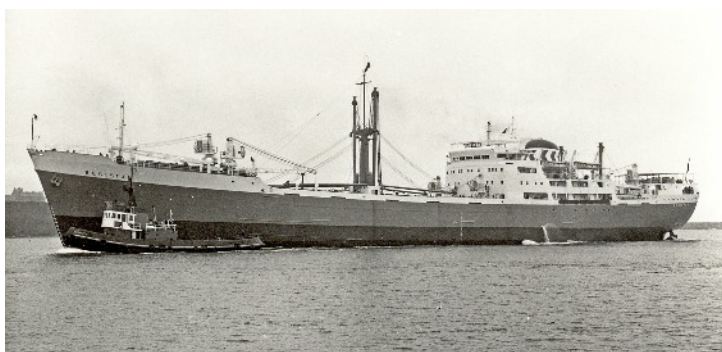
The fourth and final group, built between 1965 and 1970, were *Shahristan*, *Floristan*, *Serbistan*, *Registan*, *Tabaristan* and *Nigaristan*. With the disposal of the old *Nigaristan* and *Tabaristan* with their very heavy derricks there was a need for replacements, and *Shahristan*, *Floristan* and *Tabaristan* were fitted with Stulcken masts, the first two with 180 ton derricks and *Tabaristan* with 150 ton. The last ship, *Nigaristan*, was fitted throughout with cranes, four of which were tandem which could together lift 25 and 50 tons. The last two were the first in the fleet to have bulbous bows. In addition to these Strick built ships, the 1965 built *Elysia* was purchased in 1968 with the demise of Anchor Line, being renamed *Armanistan*.



*Armanistan* 1968 - 1972



*Nigaristan* 1970 - 1972



*Registan* 1966 - 1972



The fourth, and final, *Tabaristan*

In March 1972 P&O re-acquired the 49% shares, and in April the ships were absorbed into the P&O General Cargo Division under P&O management. At that time there were sixteen ships under the Strick flag. Three of them, *Baltistan*, *Khuzistan* and *Karaghistan* were sold within the first year, while the remaining thirteen continued to trade for P&O on their various trades worldwide under their flag and livery, which was black hull with the white P&O logo on blue funnel. In 1975 it was decided to unify the entire GCD fleet under one identity, adopting names beginning with "Strath". The only remaining clue to their origins was the next letter, so the ex-Strick fleet began "Stratha". Livery was changed to the traditional P&O passenger ship corn yellow hull. With the rapid expansion of containerisation all the general cargo ships were being disposed of, many at a premature age. All the ex-Strick ships were sold off between 1977 and 1979, all except *Baluchistan* for further trading. The final ex-Strick Line ship afloat was *Serbistan*, scrapped in 1988.

Along with the other companies whose ships were absorbed into the P&O GCD, this was the end of a great company whose funnels, flag and reputation for excellence were recognised around most of the world.



## Strick Line Cachalots

Inevitably with any medium sized shipping company of the size that Strick Line became in the 1960s, and with the Club having been in existence since 1928, there will be some Cachalots who sailed on the ships or were associated with them at some point, whether for a short period to get sea time in for a certificate or as a longer term career. Known to the author are:

Captain Sam Household, who went aloft in 2016, served from cadet to Master with Strick. In a career through all ranks his last voyage as Chief Officer on *Shahristan* in 1970 saw a collision with a tanker in fog in the English Channel resulting in damage to the starboard side of the accommodation, including his bathroom, and repairs in Southampton in which Cachalot Malcolm Coomer was heavily involved as ship's agent. At the end of that voyage he was promoted Master and his first command was to take *Albistan* on her final voyage to be scrapped. He continued for the rest of his career as Master in P&O GCD followed by P&O Bulk Division.

Captain Allen Brown, who went aloft in 1989, went to sea as cadet with Strick in 1920. Apart from a brief period as a junior officer in Blue Funnel he remained with Strick throughout his career, being promoted to Master in 1936. During World War II from 1939 to 1942 he was in command of firstly *Baharistan*, including the evacuation from St Nazaire in 1940 and a convoy attacked by *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisnau* in 1941, followed by *Kohistan* during which there was a serious cargo fire believed to have resulted from sabotage. At the end of 1942 he was sent to the Gulf as company superintendent in Basrah. After the war he sailed again in command, coming ashore as Marine Superintendent in 1949, and finally retiring in 1969 as Senior Marine Superintendent.

Cachalot Barry Vaughan sailed with Strick for the last three years before the P&O GCD merger, serving as Third Officer on *Serbistan*, *Khuzistan* and *Registan*, then Second Officer on *Registan* up to the P&O merger.

Finally, you cannot escape from the two who have been around the Club for the last fifteen to twenty years, and members for many more before that. Douglas Gates and myself both joined Strick in 1961 as cadets straight from school, so serving the full sea time. This included eighteen months sharing the same cabin on the *Tangistan*.

Douglas sailed as cadet on *Registan*, *Baltistan* (twice) and *Tangistan*, Third Officer on *Baltistan*, *Floristan* and *Shahristan*, and then Second Officer on *Gorjistan*, *Registan* and finally *Turkistan* up to the P&O merger.

I sailed as cadet on *Baltistan*, *Tangistan* and *Baharistan*, Third Officer on *Farsistan*, Second Officer on *Turkistan* and *Baharistan*, and Chief Officer on *Serbistan* up to the P&O merger, then finally under the P&O flag as Chief Officer on the final voyage and sale of *Karaghistan*.

BEP/03.2018



*Baltistan* 1953 - 72 , above  
*Karaghistan* 1957 -72, top right  
*Turkistan* 1963 - 72, right

Cachalots Barry Peck and Douglas Gates both served on each of these three vessels at various times.

You may have seen this article in the June '18 edition of *Seaways*, the Journal of the Nautical Institute. They, and the author, Cachalot Scott Baker, are keen to bring it to as wide an audience as possible so we are pleased to assist.

## Dangerously weighted heaving lines

A frequent – and frequently unacknowledged – problem that needs to be tackled

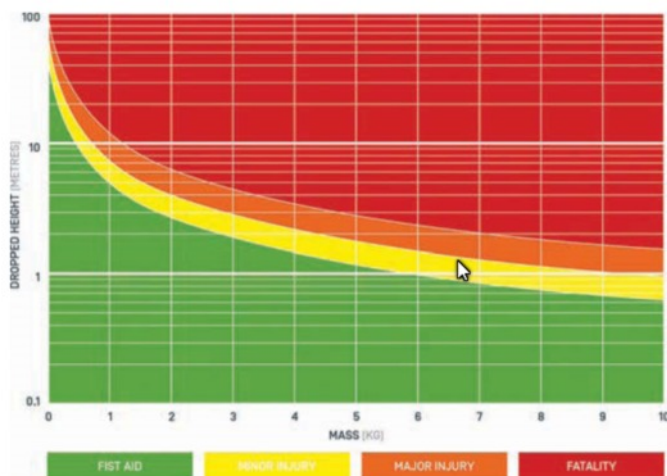
**Capt Scott Baker AFNI**

Head of Marine Standards - Svitzer Europe

The practice of using unconventional, dangerous heaving lines is an endemic and perennial problem in the maritime industry. Ships' crews use a multitude of items to weight heaving lines. These range from bolts, nuts, threaded bar, even shackles (see MARS 201643), to sector-specific objects, such as container twistlocks and vehicle wheel chocks. This practice is not acceptable and introduces the potential for serious injury if a crew member aboard a tug or mooring boat, a linesman or a shore worker is struck by such an object during mooring operations, or if the weighted end hits a member of the vessel's mooring party when the heaving line is thrown back.

A recent MARS report (MARS 201835) highlighted a near miss involving a 'dropped object'. The graph below, which appeared in that report, clearly indicates the ratio between an object's weight and the distance it falls in relation to potential outcome of hitting an individual. Large modern container ships have bow heights of more than 10 metres. Coupled with the weight of an average dangerously weighted heaving line (approximately 1kg), it is clear that an injury (or worse) could be experienced.

Some of the items removed by tug crews in recent years have clearly been manufactured for the purpose, which means that chandlers are supplying these items to ships' crews. Whether homemade or purchased, it is clear that users have adapted to their environment and suppliers have evolved to supply their customers. Some flag states have even specified protective cages for tugs under their construction rules to protect the tug crews from dangerously weighted heaving lines. This seems to be missing the point.



### Why do ships' crews do this?

There may be many reasons why crews weight heaving lines. Clearly, they are not inventing this array of dangerous weighting devices on purpose to harm tug crews and linesmen. It is more likely that crews have struggled to reach their targets over time during mooring operations and when taking towlines due to high winds – or perhaps more fundamentally, because some vessels are now so big that the height and distances involved make the use of a standard monkey's fist simply prohibitive. Weighting monkey's fists fitted to the end of heaving lines with pieces of scrap metal or sand, or attaching a heavy item such as a shackle will clearly assist the line to travel a greater distance when thrown. From one perspective, it's simply a means to an end.

In the towage industry, another worrying trend has emerged: the use of thicker, heavier messenger lines as heaving lines. These lines can be between 24–28mm in diameter. When coiled and falling from a height, they present as much of a hazard as a dangerously weighted heaving line. Because such lines are not easy to throw great distances, they tend to be used when the tug is positioned more or less beneath the ship, allowing the crew to throw the line on to the tug's deck.

### Stakeholder activity

A brief online search reveals a plethora of articles, notices and updates on this topic, all with similar messages. The loss-prevention departments of all the major protection and indemnity (P&I) clubs have focused at one time or another on this topic. There is no shortage of guidance and alerts out there, yet the message appears not to be getting through to the right people.

The Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seamen (COSWP), a best practice publication that can be found on the bookshelves of most well-managed vessels, has been updated to reflect the issues surrounding weighted heaving lines. It provides clear guidance on the matter. COSWP 26.3.5 states: 'To prevent personal injury to those receiving heaving lines, the "monkey's fist" should be made with rope only and must not contain added weighting material. Safe alternatives include a small high-visibility soft pouch, filled with fast-draining pea shingle or similar, with a weight of not more than 0.5kg. Under no circumstances is a line to be weighted by items such as shackles, bolts or nuts, or twist locks.'

Administrations such as the UK Maritime & Coastguard Agency have long had alerts in place, reiterating COSWP Chapter 26. The MCA has issued a warning that 'Vessels using dangerously weighted heaving lines in the UK may be subject to prosecution.' In support of this alert, the UK Administration is to be informed immediately after any incident involving dangerously weighted heaving lines. An alert could initiate a priority one (P1) inspection under the Paris MoU on Port State Control.

Harbour authorities, too, have acted to highlight this unacceptable practice. Like the UK MCA, they have issued notices warning of the potential penalties for the use of dangerously weighted heaving lines.

Many harbour authorities have instructed mooring teams to cut off weighted heaving lines and 'any added appendages' used during mooring operations. Items removed are retained as evidence in the event of any legal action against the vessel.

And still the problem persists.

### Education

Given the persistence of this issue, education must form a key part of resolving the problem. But where do we start? Nautical colleges around the world could play a crucial part in informing their students, both officers and seafarers. In the first instance, there is need to increase awareness of the risk posed by what many crew members believe to be an innocent act. Perhaps harbour authorities and tug operators could liaise more effectively with nautical colleges to provide a 'real-life' lecture on this matter. Perhaps they should focus on best practice, with a reminder of the potential consequences, both for the injured party and the perpetrator?



Above: Approved weight.  
Below: Illegal weights - and the consequences





## Onboard management

After the tug master-pilot information exchange, the tug master often asks the pilot for confirmation from the Master of the assisted ship that weighted heaving lines will not be used. And moments later there is a loud bang on the deck of the tug as another dangerous line is thrown down. Anecdotally, when Masters are questioned by harbour officials after the event, they claim ignorance of the presence or use of any illicit form of heaving line.

Admittedly, the reduction in vessel manning does not help. There is as much to do as ever, but with fewer crew. But this in no way alleviates the need for line managers on board to ensure they understand the regulations and/or industry best practice. When was the last time that the Master discussed this with the Chief Officer? The latter, in turn, trains the junior deck officers and the bosun, who finally manage their respective deck teams during mooring deck operations. It is my contention that few, if any, of these fundamental management conversations take place. And yet, deck officers are the first and the last line of defence against the use of dangerously weighted heaving lines.

Management at all levels must take ownership in a bid to tackle this issue, and ship owners, managers and operators must also play their part.

## Practical dilemmas

At the risk of delivering a mixed message, there are specific situations when, with adequate planning, and an appropriate level of communication, the use of a weighted line might be justified. Slowly lowering a weighted line in a controlled manner has been common practice in some areas. This is preferable to recent reports of an entirely unweighted heaving line (without even a monkey's fist) flailing uselessly in the breeze as the tug positioned itself right under the bow of a ship – in the very position where the tug would like to spend the least amount of time!

## What next?

The maritime industry must face up to this problem. This article is a call both to those affected by dangerously weighted heaving lines to continue reporting incidents by the appropriate means, including MARS, and to the officers and crews out there who can influence and ultimately eradicate this practice.

Next time you are preparing a heaving line or are in charge of a mooring party, think about the dangers it may pose to those on the receiving end – and use a monkey's fist or appropriate alternative.

If a weighted heaving line is used, don't be surprised if the line returns to the vessel without the weight! Most ports prohibit the use of additional heavy material, and vessels may be inspected or fined for breaching local regulations if a weighted end is used.

Before throwing a heaving line, the vessel's mooring party should alert the linesmen, mooring boat and/or tug crew and anyone else in the vicinity that a line is about to be thrown. The operation should only proceed if the area where the heaving line will land is clear of personnel.

Communication and planning is everything.

*Cachalot Phil Messinger is an 'OW' and attended a big reunion in June where, he says, "a load of 70+ year-old old farts spent a lot of time reminiscing! - It was wonderful!"*



## "Worcester Memories"

Fourteen years old, a new life starts.

You're shaking - scared as hell!

Make no mistake, you're nothing here.

You know it - just as well.

You walk onto a polished deck,

the brasswork shining bright.

Goodbye to parents, swallow hard,

and dread the coming night.

Unpack and stow your worldly goods,  
smile tentatively too.

And hope the boy you're looking at  
is just as scared as you.

A whistle blows - a bosun's call  
you'll know to call it soon.

A shout to gather - quickly now!

The caller calls the tune.

"Now listen here - you're very young.

The bottom of the heap!

But worry not - all will come clear.

Now go and get some sleep."

First night away from home, and all  
that ever you held dear.

A sleepless mix of tears and noise  
- unusual to your ear.

The dawn comes up at last,  
and daily orders rule your days.  
And so it starts - and carries on  
and moulds you to its ways.

Sixty years on we gather here.

The time just flew away!

The fear has gone - the memories though  
of that enormous day  
are with us still, as we recall  
that watershed of life.

And how it changed us, boys to men,  
And shaped our future life.

Phillip Messinger '63

*Written on the train going home from Greenwich, 2018*

*Phil's previous contributions include "Under the Sun", a poem he composed while cruising on the 'Arcadia' in 2013. It can be found in Cachalot 60. June 2016.*

## Website woes, and an update

A month or so ago some members reported that they were unable to register to gain access to the members only *Cachalots' Deck* on our website and we discovered that our version of WordPress, the open source website facility that we use, was so out of date that some of the plug-ins that are bolted onto it were no longer compatible or working properly. Namely the irritating 'Captcha' anti-robot device that one had to overcome on registering.

It took our expert at Cdata Services a whole day to update the site so what chance for a simple sailor like me! Because the 'theme' was also out of date that had to be polished up as well but, although the look is slightly different, the content remains the same. And we will get round to updating some of that too as soon as time and inclination allow.

Unfortunately, to keep in line with modern security recommendations we now have one of the confounded captcha thingys on the log in page as well, so there's progress for you. But worth it, of course, to open up the wealth of information to be found there. If you ever make it down to the Rules you'll probably get a mention in this newsletter.

At the time of writing, there are just 100 members who have registered to gain access to the *Cachalots Deck*, and only 21 of them have actually looked at it so far this year. Ten members who have registered have never looked at it at all. Perhaps the User name/Password/Captcha security procedure is off-putting but we can't make it much simpler, the latest Captcha input just requires four letters/figures and is much easier to read than before.

Overall, in the past six months, 744 individuals have visited our website 938 times, which sounds a bit better but equates to an average of just over five visits per day.

## New Members

**Peter William Gould** is a marine engineer, CoC First Class Engineer (Motor) STCW 78, and recently retired Head of Technical Services at Red Funnel Group. He is a Member of the Institute of Marine Engineering Science and Technology. He joins us to keep in touch with old colleagues and the industry in general. He lives in Billingshurst.

**Fiona Noone** is currently a Chief Officer with Red Funnel and completed the FdSc Maritime Operations at Warsash, being awarded the RIN's John Milner Navigation Prize in 2012. She is an ambassador for the MNTB and STEM organisations, helping to encourage young people to do science and technology and spreading the word of the Merchant Navy. She lives in Cowes and is a keen sailor and participates in many regattas throughout the year.

## Gone Aloft

**Brian James Waters**, who went aloft on the 9<sup>th</sup> June, aged 73, was a Master Mariner and was in command of the *RFA Sir Geraint* when he joined the club in 1988. He lived in Salisbury.

## The CACHALOTS

## The Southampton Master Mariners' Club

**1st Floor, Southampton Royal British  
Legion Club, Eastgate Street  
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The Club room is currently open **two** days a week, Thursday and Friday, 1130 - 1500. Liz will be only too happy to serve you a drink. There is no catering on site but there are many sandwich outlets within easy walking distance.

Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure. We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.

## Dates for your Diary

Wed 5 Sept Club Buffet Supper, RBL

Fri 5 Oct Macmillan Coffee Morning, RBL

Thu 8 Nov Sea Pie Supper tickets go on sale

Sat 10 Nov Curry Lunch, Kuti's Royal Pier

Sat	1 Dec	Christmas Lunch, MedBar
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**The cut-off date for the next edition will be**

**2nd November 2018**

## 250 Club

June A M Northover R C Plumley

**\$** July      R S Olden      D F Swayne

Aug G Lock R S Olden