

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 74

December 2019

Captain's Log

My jottings for this quarter as Captain of The Cachalots has come round again. Initially I thought it had been a quiet period, but as I put pen to paper or should I say fingers to the keyboard, I realise this is not the case.

It started off at the beginning of September with Merchant Navy Day on September 3rd. This year was especially memorable for me as I was nominated for the Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service for services to the careers of young seafarers. As I am sure you are aware, this is a day to raise public awareness of the UK's ongoing dependence on seafarers and encourages Councils and Local Authorities to fly the Red Ensign on civic buildings. Even more poignant this year, as it was 100 years ago that King George V "the sailors' King" spoke about the commitment of the Merchant Navy and its courageous seafarers. The term Merchant Navy promoted by the King, was later adopted across the world. In addition, the World Maritime Day Theme for 2019 is "Empowering Women in the Maritime Community".

September 3rd dawned and I attended the Merchant Navy Flag raising at the Southampton Civic Centre forecourt. A well attended event, the Red Ensign was hoisted to the Last Post being played on a bugle. It brought back memories of my father, who died earlier this year, playing his piano accordion whilst sailing in France. As children we would proudly lower our Red Ensign whilst he played and then watch as other yachtsmen raced aft on their yachts to do the same.

To commemorate the 100 years of the Merchant Navy, there was gala dinner in the magnificent Painted Hall at the Old Royal Naval College in Greenwich. The Cachalots managed to organise 2 tables for this wonderful event with a number of us on additional tables scattered around the hall. It can not fail to impress with such an impressive location. Just sitting under the roof and marvelling at the beautiful paintings adorning the walls and ceiling was a pleasure in itself, a venue well worth a visit just to appreciate the splendour. Lord West of Spithead gave a rousing speech with a response from Commander Graham Hockley, The Secretary, Corporation of Trinity House. An outside drinks reception in the King William Colonnade gave ample opportunities to meet some of the other guests, with 400 of us we were spoilt for choice. The menu was designed to reflect trading patterns in British Ports in the 1950's. There was live jazz music playing and magicians wandering around, but our table didn't see or hear any of this (we were talking too much). The finale was a foot long chocolate galleon delivered to each table with sparklers and numerous chocolate cannon ball truffles covering the deck. The whole event was a wonderful experience and one I was very pleased to have been involved in.

A number of us were staying in the same hotel, so having met the night before for the obligatory pre-evening dinner drink, we then reconvened conversations the following morning or met those who had been neglected the night before just because they had not been seen. All in all, a fabulous evening and one I was fortunate to attend.

I was asked by Solent University to "talk" to the new intake of cadets. Their first day at college saw them being met by their various lecturers. I was the first actual seafarer some of them had ever met. For me, it's always daunting when you stand in a classroom full of 120 students. Promoting the joys of being at sea and the down sides. I must have ignited some interest as I have been asked carry out further talks to the next lot of new intakes. Several of the female cadets remained behind to ask questions about problems particular to females at sea and how did I deal with them.

The Macmillan Big Coffee Morning was a resounding success. Held downstairs at the Royal British Legion, there was a vast array of cakes. Thank you Robin Plumley for your delicious gluten free mandarin cake, it was delicious. Over £500 was raised for a very worthy cause with a lot of very happy fed customers.

I was away in Australia for most of October, surprising my sister for her birthday. As a result, I did not get to attend the Trafalgar Night Dinner but my husband, who is also a member of the club, did manage to arrange a table, even though he was feeling slightly jaded, having landed back from Australia at midday on the same day. He did say the food was excellent with the roast beef melting in the mouth. The speech by Commodore Richard Farrington CBE gave a history of the battle, and followed it up with the subsequent lives of the major participants. Strangely enough Richard was also in Sydney when we were there, so we managed to meet up with him for a meal and some salty stories.

GAFIRS (my chosen charity) continue being very busy. At the end of October, the day started at 3am and the boat was finally put away at 6pm. They assisted in 3 separate casualties. GAFIRS were recognised with a variety of awards and medals for meritorious and commendable service at the National RLSS awards ceremony in Worcester. They also received the inaugural Stuart Bailey Memorial Award, which was presented for demonstrating excellence in open water activities. It's great to see their hard work being recognised.

Captain Rachel Dunn



Boatsteerer's Locker

Fellow Cachalots

This Blog is being compiled a bit earlier this year due to our illustrious Editor going away to Kerala to get his knees as brown as a certain sauce. As I write this, Halloween is upon us with carved pumpkins everywhere (an American idea). I have been up the loft and found my scary skeleton suite and will be dressed up to open the front door and frighten the daylighters of any 'trick and treaters' who dare knock. How things have changed, as these days nobody plays conkers but no doubt Guy Fawkes on the 5th will be celebrated as normal.

First we must congratulate our Club Captain Rachel in being awarded the 'Merchant Navy Medal for Meritorious Service' in September for services to the careers of young seafarers.

Since my last Blog we have been on a cruise to Bordeaux and Seville and found that a few cabins away from us were Cachalots Kay and Len Sheriff who we were pleased to meet up with. A certain Cachalot must have been on the ship's previous cruise as the oriental stewardesses in the Observatory Cocktail Lounge on the first formal night pointed to my cummerbund and said to each other 'Ah! lookie, all same same our flend Leggie' with lots of giggles after which were always well looked after, like royalty.

Some of our memorabilia has gone to be auctioned and the remainder has been offered to the members before being disposed of elsewhere. Our thanks must be given to Past Captain Robin Plumley for his sterling hard work cataloguing and publicising the disposal of some of our artefacts. The glass cased model of "Endeavour" has gone on loan to the National Oceanography Centre, Southampton for display.

Robin must also be thanked for giving us a Magic Lantern Show on his time with the British Antarctic Research Ships which attracted 20 members on a Thursday lunch time. The next show is scheduled on 'Cable Ships' by Berry Peck again on a Thursday lunchtime (see Notice Board and Cachalite).

Incidentally there is a booklet 'Engine Room' on life on Cable Ships by Cachalot John Prince on sale in the Club Room with proceeds to the Captain's Charity.

I attended the Mayor's Trafalgar Dinner in aid of the Southampton Sea Cadet Unit at the Grand Café which the Club organised, it was a splendid affair enjoyed by all and raised £1250 for the Cadets.

Looking ahead, our Christmas Lunch will again be held in 'Medbar' in Oxford Street on 7th December and I look forward to joining you all there.

This will be followed by the Dockland Service on 2nd January, the venue is still to be confirmed after which the Club reopens at 11-30 for a tot or sip of mulled wine.

Our next big event in the 2020 Programme is our AGM on 9th January when five of our Harpooners must retire from the Management Committee in accordance with the Rules but may offer themselves for re-election. A call for candidates will appear on the Notice Board.

Preparations are well in hand for the Sea Pie Supper in St. Marys Stadium Banqueting Suites on 7th February, this year as an experiment we will not have the band which reportably drowns out nearby tables conversation. Our principal guest will be Stephen Payne who designed the QM2.

Please note that I will not be sending Christmas Cards to fellow members again this year but will make a donation to the

Captain's Charity instead. I hope that other members do the same.

Finally Richard, Liz and the Management Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you all 'Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year' and don't get too turkified or inebriated.



Dates for your 2020 Diary

Docklands New Year Service on Thursday 2nd January at 09-30 hrs, venue to be advised, and Club reopens at 11-30.

Meeting of the Past Captains will be held on Saturday 4th January at 11-00 hrs

Ken Dagnall
Boatsteerer

AGM

**will be held in the club room on
Thursday 9th January at 18-30 hrs.**

Harpooners Gerry Cartwright, Terry Clark, Douglas Gates, Peter Grant and Jeremy Smart come to the end of their two year term and may offer themselves for re-election.

There is no provision in our rules for proxy voting so five Harpooners from the list of candidates will be elected by those present on the night.

From the Editor

This edition has been produced a little earlier than usual to accommodate the fact that the entire editorial staff has gone gallivanting off to a retreat in India. I would like to think that if it had been produced in the usual time frame then I might have been inundated with last minute contributions, but I suspect not. I have included three pieces from Michael Grey and Lloyds List, always excellent comment and a good read, in my view. My thanks again to Reg Kelso for helping me to pad it out a bit more.

Macmillan Cancer Support

The Coffee Morning

on

Friday, 4th October

Raised

£528

On the day, which should generate a further

£61.25

In Gift Aid

Thanks to those who provided, made and baked the cakes, jams and chutneys and brewed and stewed the tea and coffee.



**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

Sea Pie Supper

Friday 7th February 2020

St. Mary's Stadium

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

£53 for members, **£65** for guests

Curry Lunch



KUTI'S ROYAL PIER



“Officially the Best Indian Restaurant in the UK”

The first Curry Lunch next year will be held at
Kuti's again.

Sat 15th February 1200 for 1230

We have yet to negotiate a price for next years
lunches but in view of their recent award we
anticipate an increase to around **£21** each to include
the gratuity.

But still great value.

Friends and family welcome.
Book through the office please.

Parking in Mayflower Park is currently
£2 for 4 hours

Christmas Lunch at the Medbar

**Saturday 7th 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 starters, mains and
desserts. This year they are including,
just for our party, a traditional Turkey
main dish with all the trimmings.
The menu and choices are posted on
the notice board in the club room and
also on our website:

<http://www.cachalots.org.uk/cachalots-deck/forthcoming-events/christmas-luncheon/>:

All for **£23** per head,
to include the gratuity.

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

Burns Supper

Our Caledonian Cultural Experience
will be held downstairs at the RBL again, on

Wednesday, 22nd January

Expect the traditional fare and
maybe something a wee bit different
in the 'sangs and clatter'.

1900 for 1930

Black Tie & Miniatures

Price expected to be around
£32 per head (tbc)



Subs & 250 Club

With this newsletter you should also receive your subscription renewal form & '250 Club' Application.

Also the Provisional Programme of Events for 2020



‘TWO-FLUED’ HAND-HELD HARPOON

This harpoon has been in “safe-keeping” in Captain Lionel Hall’s barn since the Club moved out of the original premises in Royal Mail House. A recent rummage unearthed it and we have permission from the Royal British Legion Club to display it in the Club room. The attached plate is inscribed:

PRESENTED TO THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS’ CLUB BY W.R. SPENCE
ON BEHALF OF THE NATIONAL UNION OF SEAMEN
AS KEEN EVIDENCE OF THE PENETRATION OF MUTUAL GOOD-WILL, JUNE 1928

This Weapon was last actually used by a Harpooner of the Dundee Whaler “NOVA ZEMBLA” (Capt W^m Guy) in July 1896

See Captain Robin Plumley’s article on page 6.



Take two

Boatsteerer Ken Dagnall gave an amusing account of his life, travels and work as a Lloyds Surveyor at the Club Buffet Supper held at the RBL on 4th September. Also how he came to be appointed the British Consul in Le Havre, almost by default, he seemed to think.

I think he was keen to be photographed, as he is seen here encouraging me to take another shot.

The caterer had us all worried by not turning up until 15 minutes before the event and then declared that he had forgotten how many we were and had only allowed for 32. We were 39 but there an ample amount for another dozen at least. What he may lack in communication skills he certainly makes up for in the quality and quantity of his food.

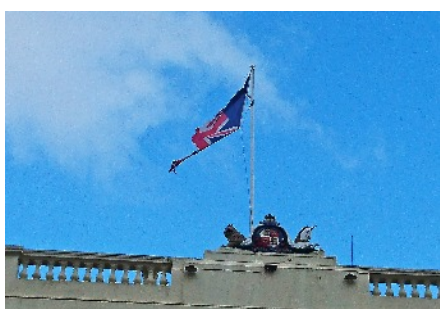


The Painted Hall - Old Royal Naval College - Greenwich

See the Captain’s Log on the front page.

L: A chocolate galleon on a sea of napkins.

R: Storekeeper Capt. Ian Odd and Mrs Lesley Odd enjoy the ambiance and the occasion.



Vexing Vexillology Update

A further deterioration in the state of the flag-rag that flies above the Star Hotel in Southampton Below Bar.

Our Harpooners Dinner is due to take place there on the 22nd November so maybe someone will take the opportunity to enlighten their Flag Officer.

Credit where it's due

Lloyd's List Viewpoint 3 October 2019

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

The art of the headline writer is to encourage the reader to go a little further into the story than the headline itself. My all-time favourite in this newspaper was "Giant sheep carrier launched". But when I read about "Japan's first carbon neutral voyage" I'm afraid that my first reaction was to marvel at Japanese engineering ingenuity.

Was the 7000unit car carrier *Aries Leader* assisted in this remarkable achievement by gigantic kites dragging the ship through the trade wind belts? Was the huge acreage of the upper deck covered with some new and powerful solar panelling, or festooned with Flettner rotors whirring away? Or perhaps the ship was burning some amazing new biofuel made from a genetically altered rice product, or high octane miso soup, emitting nothing more than an appetising aroma? The mind was, as it were, boggling.

The punchline, in the very first sentence if I had bothered to read it, clarified the situation perfectly. Although the ship was itself highly advanced, owners NYK pointing out that it emitted some 30% less CO2 than a comparable car carrier of less sophisticated a design, the "carbon-neutrality" of the voyage was achieved through the purchase of carbon credits to offset the ship's emissions. Some 5000tons of CO2 had been offset to neutralise the effects of this ship's machinery on a voyage from Japan to the Middle East.

It may not have been their sole aim, but the giant Japanese owner gained a lot of positive public relations from their "carbon-neutral" voyage, coinciding with the UN's New York climate change summit and the histrionics from Swedish teenage phenomena Greta Thunberg. Carbon credits bought with them all sorts of other credits for the identification of NYK as a company that takes sustainability seriously and is prepared to face the costs of such a commitment.

Maybe we shouldn't be surprised that real action on maritime sustainability (as opposed to talking about it) is coming from Japan. They have some very big operators, along with mechanisms for research and innovation that constitute a sort of Japan Inc. which can put real weight and resources behind their efforts. Who remembers that in the 1980s (albeit because of the oil price rather than fears of CO2), Japanese innovators were building ships incorporating serious wind assistance with very advanced designs that did not involve crew having to go aloft? You can guarantee that there will be plenty of breakthroughs in the sustainability stakes emerging from this part of the world.

Mind you, whether the purchase of carbon credits to "compensate" for the emission of all those tonnes of CO2 are more than a temporary contributor, is a very moot point. Rather than something that really mitigates harmful emissions at the point they might emerge from the exhausts, it seems more like someone assuaging their guilt. All those attendees at the all the environmental conferences who "offset" the emissions from the gigantic turbofan engines speeding them through the stratosphere doubtless sink into their seats with satisfaction at the polish adhering to their environmental credentials. Some of us might suggest it would make a lot more sense for them to stay at home in this age of competent conference calling. And if closely questioned, are they really clear about where their guilt-money has gone, how much has been creamed off in administration and service charges, and how many trees that have actually been planted as a result of their "offsets"?

But clever design went into making *Aries Leader* a leader in sustainable shipping, and we maybe ought to think of this ship alongside a whole raft of industry initiatives that prove that shipping is taking its climate change responsibilities very seriously. If you divert your attention from the endless gloom and doom broadcast by those who have a vested interest in making us all despair (the words "climate scientist" bring a chill to my heart), every day brings some new positive revelation of engineering being applied in our industry to address these problems.

On one day alone we learn about the ultra-low sulphur biofuel being tested in one of the world's biggest dredging fleets, and a short sea ship being fitted with a revolutionary type of aerofoil wind assistance. One shipping company is converting a major unit to burn LNG (accepting the sacrifice of some 300TEU to hold the fuel). Another is proposing what is described as "super-slow" steaming to produce a quick result. Yet another is eschewing the short-cut through Arctic waters to keep them safer. The development of "second-generation" biofuel is being trialled. And every day this newspaper tells you of some exciting development in batteries, in fuel-cells, in realising the promise of hydrogen and the trials of other types of sustainable fuels. There are improvements in engine design, hydrodynamic advances being accomplished. Look at what is being done in the more advanced ports. And there are advocates, as we learn, of carbon offsetting as at least one demonstration of the industry's seriousness.

It all has to be paid for, of course and this will be something of a test for the sincerity of the users of shipping. Will they be prepared to cough up sufficiently to encourage the engineers in their quest for more sustainable logistics? Or, like the products of these endless climate conferences, will they prefer to carry on talking, with the occasional "offset" to assuage their guilt?

rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk



A Harpoon and the *Nova Zembla*

Since Captain Lionel Hall brought the harpoon into the club at the end of August 2019, it has caught the imagination of a number of us in the club.

The harpoon is about six feet in length and has a ‘two-flued’ head attached to a wooden handle.

The inscription provided further interest, especially for me and our Boatsteerer and from our research have found various records relating to the Dundee Whaler *Nova Zembla*. The first clue was that the wreck had been found recently in 2018 after an investigation by researchers from Calgary. Records show the vessel sank in 1902. More than 200 ships from British whaling fleets are thought to have perished in the Canadian Arctic and the wreck of the *Nova Zembla* is the first of these to be discovered. It is believed forty Dundee whalers lie beneath the Arctic whaling grounds, crushed by ice.

The *Nova Zembla* departed Dundee on March 31st, 1902 bound for the whaling fields of the Davis Strait in the Canadian Arctic. On November 3rd, 1902, The Dundee Courier reported the crew and cargo of the *Nova Zembla* had been rescued by other ships, after striking a reef during a storm in the Davis Straits on September 18th of that year.

The report read: “Great storms have raged in the far north and as a result of one of these the *Nova Zembla* – one of the five vessels which formed the Dundee Whaling Fleet – ran aground on the evening of September 18th and became a total wreck. “This occurred about a mile to the south of Dexterity fjord, which is on the west side of the Davis straits.

“Fortunately, no lives were lost, but many of the crew had narrow escapes.

“The Master at the time was Captain John Cooney, who had been the ship’s mate for the previous nine years under Captain William Guy, who had been Master of the vessel in 1882, 1893, 1894 and 1902.

“In fact, had it not been for the assistance obtained by the whalers *Diana* and the *Eclipse*, who were only about six miles from the scene of the wreck, every man on board the ill-fated *Nova Zembla* must have perished.”

A report the following day updated the city, which said: “A boat was sent once to the ill-fated ship (the *Nova Zembla*). “It was thought at first that she had been abandoned, but boarding the vessel the captain, mate, and chief engineer were still standing by. The crew had got ashore in the boats but had been unable to return.

“The ship was doomed, but the *Diana*’s crew risked much in rescuing the whalebone secured by the unfortunate whaler. Much difficulty attended the task, but it was ultimately all hooked from the hold and transferred to the *Diana*.

“Despite being lost, because of the actions of the other ships the crew was still able to turn a profit, after selling the single black whale it had caught days before.”

Information found about the design of hand-held harpoons indicated:

The two-flue harpoon was the primary weapon used in whaling around the world, but it tended to penetrate no deeper than the soft outer layer of blubber. Thus, it was often possible for the whale to escape by struggling or swimming away forcefully enough to pull the shallowly embedded barbs out backwards. This flaw was corrected in the early nineteenth century with the creation of the one flue harpoon; by removing one of the flues, the head of the harpoon was narrowed, making it easier for it to penetrate deep enough to hold fast.

The *Nova Zembla*

Ken Dagnall provided a record from the Lloyds Register Books 1899-1900

Whaler ‘NOVA ZEMBLA’ of Dundee Wood – beech (timber), Screw Propeller.

Official No. 72541, Call Letters PJGF, Capt. W. Guy since 1893

375 gross tons, 346 tons under deck, 255 net tons.

Built 1873 by Wenclose, Bremerhaven

Owners W.O. Taylor & Co., Dundee

Length 140.7 ft, breadth 27.8 ft, depth 15.7 ft.

Compound Steam Engine 2 cylinders 21” and 36” diam. with 23” stroke, built by Hansa Co., Rostock, nominal horsepower 58, new boiler 1893

Class not stated

From 1902 the Registered Owners also owned/managed Dundee Shipping Co. Ltd. which had 8 ships all with ‘Glenxxxx’ names.

Photographs are scarce but the one on the right, from the Kenn Harper collection, is noted as being the *Nova Zembla*.



Captain William Guy (Extract from his obituary and other sources)

Captain Guy belonged to Larne, and his early connection with Tayside was formed in the days when he made his first voyage to the Arctic in 1866 in the *Camperdown* along with the late Captain Alex Fairweather. He was appointed first mate on the *Jan Mayen* in 1875. His career in command of whaling vessels began in 1878, and in the best years of the Dundee whalers he captained first the *Nova Zembla*, and later the *Arctic*, the *Polynia*, and *Hope*, of Peterhead.

Captain Guy had several exciting experiences in the Far North. Undoubtedly the most serious was that in 1891, when the *Polynia*, of which he was in command, was crushed in the ice in Lancaster Sound. The whaler made water so rapidly that she had to be abandoned, the crew having to take refuge on an icefloe. For three days and three nights the men were adrift on the floe, and some of them were very exhausted before they were rescued by two other Dundee whalers.

He retired as the senior captain of the fleet in 1901, after 50 years at sea, nearly 35 years at whaling, 23 as master.

With all the bluff ways of the sailor the captain combined genial kindness and the Irishman's inborn love of humour, and he had many friends ashore and afloat. On retirement he settled down at Woodhaven, his home commanding a fine view of the training ship Mars, in which he took keen and hopeful interest.

W.R. Spence

William Robert Locke Spence, CBE, (9 October 1875 - 3 March 1954) was a British politician.

Born in Cockpen in Midlothian, Spence was educated at the Royal High School, Edinburgh. When he was fifteen, he became an apprentice sailor, and joined the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union (NSFU). He served in the Merchant Navy for many years, becoming an officer.

In 1911, Spence began working full-time as an official of the NSFU, based on shore, initially in South Shields, and later in various ports in the south of England. In 1928, he was elected as the union's general secretary, and from 1931 to 1941, he additionally served on the General Council of the Trades Union Congress.

Spence was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1937. During World War II, he was a member of the Advisory Council to the Ministry of Shipping. He retired in 1942, settling in Shoreham-by-Sea.

The author has gathered information which is freely available on the internet of things and acknowledges the web pages of the following, with thanks;

The Courier of Dundee

The Evening telegraph of Dundee

Whale Captains from www.explorenorth.com/whalers/features

Captain Robin Plumley MBE

Ken Dagnall MBE

VETERAN DUNDEE WHALER

DEAD.

**CAPTAIN OF MANY FAMOUS
VESSELS.**



Well Met: Another tale from the Arctic

Cachalot Colin Crimp and his partner Jill Fitzpatrick own a camper van which they keep in Prince George, north of Vancouver in British Columbia. They like to spend their summers exploring the wilds of Canada and this year they ventured up the newly extended Dempsey Highway as far as the coast of the Arctic Ocean. At about 70° that's 3½° N of the Arctic Circle.

From Colin's journal:

'We looked out on the Arctic Ocean, still covered with thick ice as far as the eye could see, and then, after Jill had paddled in the thawed bit at the edge of the ocean, we did what the English have to do in such circumstances –we put the kettle on and had a nice cup of tea.

Dinner that evening was chicken and chips from Grandma's Kitchen, on the Arctic Ocean beach in the bright night-time sunshine, and a sampler plate of a few little bits of beluga blubber, just to try it. It had apparently been boiled for 2 hours and was still as chewy as hell. At \$10 for 10 little bits on cocktail sticks, by my reckoning that's a dollar per cubic centimetre. Everything is expensive up here.

Next day we returned to Inuvik and went for fish and chips at Alestine's, where the kitchen is in an old yellow school bus and a blackboard outside proudly proclaims "Gluten? – we put that shit in everything". Best fish and chips ever.

The journey coming south down the Dempster was just as spectacular as that going north, possibly even more so as the views and the light were all from a different angle. Halfway back, we stopped again at the oasis in the middle of nowhere, Eagle Plains Hotel and, as you do, approached the bar. A voice said 'Colin, is that you?'. We had last talked to the owner of that voice at a Master Mariners' skittles do in Southampton. Jeremy and Trish Smart were heading up the Dempster while we were heading down. We were way off our intended dates and had no idea that they were anywhere near Yukon.'

Colin and Jill met up with Jeremy and Trish again just recently, at the Trafalgar Dinner, and maybe will have time to compare travel notes at the next skittles evening in March.

Auction of Club Items – An update

The auction for club members was closed on 31st August. Twenty-three items were bid for, bringing in a total of £1,333.

Eight plaques were bid for by members. The following numbers of plaques remain as:

Eleven Canadian; two German; four Dutch; one Icelandic; one Italian; one Norwegian; one South African; forty-four UK; three American and ten other various plaques.

The UK plaques with vessels linked to the Royal Navy have been offered to the Southampton Sea Cadets who will make a selection to use in their new headquarters.

Seventeen lots were identified by Charles Miller Ltd, the UK's only auctioneer and valuer dedicated to maritime and scientific art and antiques.

They are being placed in an auction to be held at Olympia on Tuesday 5th November 2019.

Hopefully I will receive a summary from Charles on completion of the sale of what was successfully sold and at what value and I will provide further update once received.

Forty-seven items remain unsold.

Unfortunately, the guidance from the London auctioneer was that the items of sterling silver only had scrap value for melting and the EPNS items were just scrap. Sadly, it seems items which have personal engravings and other such inscriptions are of little or no value.

The last Management Committee meeting agreed to look for a dealer to make an offer on the remaining items.

Many thanks to the members who took an active part in bidding for items.

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE



Cachalot Barry Eagles was the successful bidder for the *CARMANIA* bell. The brass bell, mounted on a wooden stand, is inscribed "Carmania 1905 -1932" and came from the famous Cunarder of that name, converted to an armed merchant-cruiser, which fought and sank the German sea-raider *Cap Trafalgar* in the South Atlantic during the First World War. It was presented to the Club by the ship-breaking firm of Hughes-Bolckow of Blyth after the liner was scrapped there. The custom used to be for this bell to be struck every half-hour, ship's-time fashion, during Club Luncheon meetings.

Barry, who among many other positions, is the secretary and almoner of the Lodge of Peace and Harmony. He says, "We were 200 years old on Trafalgar Day this year. The lodge is an old seafarer's lodge and at our meal at 9.00pm we have the absent brethren toast, which is normally gavelled. I have now started a tradition of ringing two bells on the Carmania's bell at this time, so the old bell is being put to good use."



Travels through time and space

“Doctor who?”... queried the flight attendant in that condescending manner reserved for the confused and elderly, for which I qualify on both counts.

“No, no! Not Dr. Who,...Dr. Penfold”, I replied, “a glass of Dr. Penfold’s plonk, please”.

He had previously handed me the wine list that accompanied dinner and I saw that one of the choices was “Penfolds Bin 311 Chardonnay 2017”.

The Spirit of Dr. Who having been summoned, like a genie out of that particular bottle, to my own personal Tardis, hurtling through the stratosphere at Mach 0.82, and “*Ding*” (No VWORP! VWORP! sound effects here), I was immediately transported back to the Australian coast in the early ‘60s.

Those were the days of the ‘6 o’clock swill’, when the pubs would shut at 1800 and the 9-to-5’ers would cram all their drinking into one hour with indecent haste and with the inevitable consequences. If one wanted to continue drinking through the evening, the answer was, more often than not, to resort to a carry-out of a bottle of cheap domestic red wine, known derogatorily by all hands as ‘Dr. Penfold’s Plonk’.

As I continued to read the flowery description in the wine list I saw that the fruit was sourced from, among other places, ‘Tumbarumba’.

“*Ding*” and fast forward to 2004 on the Gold Coast of eastern Australia where my wife and I had spent a happy holiday. Tumbarumba wines were some of our favourites, probably due to the wonderful name as much as any perceived quality.

Sipping my glass of Penfolds ‘plonk’ I reflected on how one glass of wine could conjure up so many memories.

But plonk no more! In December 2018 a bottle of the first vintage (1951) of Penfolds “Grange” Shiraz sold at auction for \$80,386, that’s £62,350. The much more recent 2014 vintage is currently on offer from the Sunday Times Wine Club at £420 per bottle, a saving of £60. Elsewhere you can pay up to £650. Even the modest 2017 Chardonnay that I was drinking sells from £26 to £47.25, pretty good for an airline offering.

One more sip and “*Ding*”, I was transported back to the ‘60s again and another Aussie port, Adelaide. We were loading scrap metal and Wharfie rules dictated that all work would cease once the temperature tipped 100° F. They all repaired to the pub and, taking pity on us poor apprentices, would often take us with them.

The public bar was quite big, with a central rectangular island behind which were many chiller cabinets. But they didn’t contain any drink, just hundreds of chilled glasses. Your amber nectar was delivered right to the freshly chilled glass in front of you by way of a flexible hose and nozzle, like a miniature petrol pump. You ordered a ‘middy’ (½ pint) or a ‘schooner’ (¾ pint) for in those pre air-conditioned days any larger volume would have gone warm before you had time to drink it, a definite Aussie no-no.

The public bars were for men only, standing shoulder to shoulder, with nothing so effete as a chair in sight. ‘Sheilas’ were only allowed in lounge bars and had to drink sitting down.

Another sip, another “*Ding*” and I was in Sydney, in the Macquarie at Woolloomaloo. New South Wales was a more enlightened State and, in order to end the notorious 6 o’clock swill, had already amended their licencing hours in the previous decade to accommodate a more friendly 2200 closing time. That was back in 1955 and they called it ‘BE Day’, for Beer in the Evening. The public bar at the Macquarie Hotel was another great barn of a room and the trick here was to get as close to the bar as possible without of course blocking it off and interfering with the constant sale and flow of ‘Tooheys’. A fifteen minute drinking up time was permitted but before the 10 o’clock closing time the alarm bells would start ringing and the bouncers, without fear nor favour, would start ejecting those closest to the doors out on to the street. Hence the need to huddle near the bar in the hope of having the honour of being the last out.

It may appear from my recollections that we spent all our time ashore in the pubs and there is no denying that there was a strong drinking culture in British ships at that time. We would be in port for days or weeks at a time loading or discharging and had ample time to become familiar with the locals and their local pubs, even if we didn’t have ample money to fully enjoy them. It was always a good run ashore and I have nothing but happy memories of my time spent on the Aussie coast.

Back in the present, strapped in to my speeding time capsule, I was pleased that the proffered elixir had evoked such reminiscences.

“Another glass of Dr. Penfolds, please.”

Terry Clark

Combining aid and training

Lloyd's List Viewpoint 24th October 2019

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

What's not to like about a scheme that will address two serious problems simultaneously? There is scarcely a month goes by without some sort of natural disaster overwhelming people who have a very limited capacity to deal with it. Hurricanes, typhoons, tropical revolving storms and cyclones, we are told by earnest climatologists, are becoming more frequent and more dangerous. You might argue with this; suggesting that these patterns have always been cyclical, and that so much of the damage is caused by wretchedly poor infrastructure and too many people building close to floodable areas, but there is no dispute about the need for regular humanitarian aid and disaster relief, when these regular catastrophes occur.

There is also no arguing with the need for a maritime sealift as the most effective way of dealing with these emergencies, backed up with helicopters. Only ships can land the heavy plant and equipment, the tonnes of supplies and shelter that are needed when a natural disaster has wrecked a local economy. But not every ship is suitable, as the chances are that any port will be unusable and that equipment may have to be landed on open beaches. You will probably need landing craft, pontoons and portable jetties.

The other problem which will not go away is the difficulty of providing adequate training places for UK cadets, giving them the sea time and sea experience that they need to progress. In the bad old days, fine British shipping companies trained their own cadets and apprentices, many employing their own training ships for the purpose. They have, like the companies themselves, long gone. And in the days of international manning, with training judged by many to be too expensive, there is a paucity of training places, despite a number of public-spirited owners and managers doing their bit.

So could there be answers to both of these two problems? A charity, Britannia Maritime Aid proposes just this solution, with a multi-purpose disaster relief vessel to be stationed in the Caribbean, an area of regular and demonstrable need. As a concept it has moved quite far and fast, with a design for a ro-pax vessel, which could be also employed to train good numbers of UK and Commonwealth cadets and other trainees. The charity has a design devised by the naval architects Leadship and at the recent London International Shipping Week announced that Cammell Laird would be the constructor of the vessel.

Drawings of the proposed vessel reveal a conventional ro-pax configuration, but with an extensive helicopter landing area at the after end of the ship and sizeable davit launched landing craft deployed on the sides of the vessel. The stern door and ramp gives access to a capacious cargo deck in which modules for whatever task is needed can be easily accommodated.

The organisers have clearly looked outside the box and suggest that the craft would also be capable of a range of other functions, from scientific, environmental uses and even providing a ferry service if there is a demand. Moreover, such a ship, when not involved in humanitarian assistance, could provide mobile exhibition space for British exporters. The ship would be permanently stationed in the Caribbean, arguably a place of great and regular need.

On the face of it, it is a brilliant concept, lacking only a substantial amount of money to see the scheme under way. Where is the money going to come from? You could probably make a very good argument that a substantial slice could be contributed from the UK's aid budget, which is regularly under attack for its misspent millions. As a worthy recipient for charitable giving from both industry and individuals, it would surely make a very good case. And the charity has also indicated that in order to get the show on the road, before the new ship can be completed, it would be possible to acquire a cheaper, interim vessel, which seems eminently sensible.

Could it work? It is a convincing case, although the multiple role of the ship will need careful handling to avoid confusing the issue. A donor to humanitarian aid may find it difficult to reconcile the donation that is apparently funding a maritime training operation. Those with cadets to train will find it easier, although they will wish to know that the training regime is relevant to their subsequent career. Some might even suggest that there is no place for trainees in the aftermath of a huge humanitarian disaster. But it deserves to fly, for all the reasons above.

There is thus a convincing case for both sea training and disaster aid. I was talking to a team from Mercy Ships at the recent Interferry conference and that organisation has demonstrated the efficacy of a maritime dimension, albeit for medical assistance. Mind you, its staff are volunteers, which must make a huge difference to its affordability.

Others have suggested alternative ideas for disaster relief. The Australian designers Sea Transport have a design adapted from one of their transshipment port craft, which can support a substantial aviation component. There has been much interest in the US Navy's Forward Operating Base ship design, which has seen additional units ordered and is effectively a mobile port with huge helicopter and landing craft capability. A ship with an on board floodable dock, like the useful Royal Fleet Auxiliaries, would obviously offer other possibilities. Cost is obviously a major sticking point with any one-off design and a "conventional" ro-pax obviously is less of a risk.

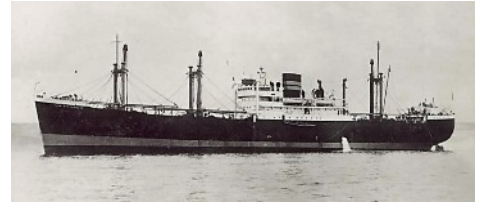
But where there can be no argument is over the needs that the BMA charity hopes to address. The UK used to be a "maritime nation". Now we are regularly visited each year by beautiful big sail training ships operated by countries, with far more modest maritime credentials. They think sea training is worth the investment. Combining this obvious requirement, with the provision of humanitarian assistance ought to be worth the effort.

rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk



Clan Maclachlan: story of a stormy diversion on her last B&C trip

Late in the summer of 1971, Clan Maclachlan left Liverpool in ballast, destined for Shanghai and the hands of her new owners. To Capt. C. R. Kelso and his crew it looked like a fairly routine job—until they reached the Far East at the same time as three typhoons. Capt. Kelso's report of Clan Maclachlan's enforced diversion to Hong Kong is given here almost exactly as it reached the management in London.



On departure from Singapore on October 4 "Full Away" was rung at 17.12 local time. The vessel was ballasted in accordance with the stability form part one submitted from Singapore and, immediately after departure, the fore peak was ballasted giving an estimated draft of F.10ft. 7ins, A.19ft. Oil fuel on departure was 548.0 tons the vessel having taken 220.6 tons at Singapore.

The intended route was as specified in *Steamship Routes* p.152, R691a, but passing 30' east of the Island of Taiwan in accordance with instructions received at my pre-sailing interview in London.

The best information available in Singapore was that the SW Monsoon was still strong and that the KE Monsoon was weak in the North China Sea.

On departure Singapore an hourly log was maintained detailing barometric pressure, shift of wind and cloud conditions; weather forecasts were obtained from every available source including Guam, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Taiwan. Many of these proved to be inaccurate and misleading and the "on board" record (from which a daily weather map was compiled) proved invaluable.

Typhoon *Elaine* was first reported on the morning of the 7th when Guam reported it as quasi-stationary. Our own observations during the day disputed this and speed was reduced to allow the storm to pass ahead. Although the storm centre passed some 300 miles ahead of *Clan Maclachlan* the vessel very quickly encountered the strong winds and heavy swell with rough seas generated by it.

Three-storm effect

These conditions reduced our manoeuvring potential considerably and when typhoon *Faye* swept over Luzon we were unable to make sufficient speed to clear the storm centre by as much as I would have wished. This storm (which was intense) passed some 200 miles astern and maintained a westerly course towards Hainan. The development and path of typhoon *Gloria* were masked by the already low barometric pressure and appalling weather conditions and only one radio station made reference to it, the other three continuing to report it as Typhoon *Faye*. The cumulative effect of these three violent storms in very quick succession produced a type of weather which I find difficult to describe. On Sunday, October 10 the conditions were such as to give rise to grave concern with winds of force 10 and mountainous seas which, at times, obscured the horizon from bridge level. The ship had a GM in excess of — 5.0 feet and her rolling action was so violent that it is miraculous that nobody incurred serious injury.

Throughout this period of violent weather (with the vessel trimmed some nine feet by the stern) steering became difficult and the vessel commenced to "pound" heavily. When speed was reduced to prevent pounding the vessel could not be steered at all and when speed was increased to afford steerage way the vessel pounded dangerously. Eventually it became essential to steer compromise courses and turn compromise rpm. Various methods of steering were attempted and it was found that the vessel could best be controlled by the OOW steering with the Arkas tiller attachment.

Driven steadily west

The vessel was being driven steadily west and all attempts to make an easting were abortive. Celestial navigation was prevented by heavy clouds and frequent rain squalls and an accurate assessment of our position was not possible. I was eventually forced to abandon the attempt to transit the Bashi Channel and the vessel passed to the west of the southern end of Taiwan. In the lee of Taiwan a good passage was experienced until the vessel had passed south of the Pescadores Islands (no chart of the Pescadores Channel was available on board).

After clearing the Island of Dai Sho all efforts to steer a northeasterly course proved fruitless and the vessel again started to pound heavily. Speed was reduced to limit this dangerous pounding and the vessel immediately broached-to. It was apparent that the only solution was to increase rpm and resort to compromise courses keeping the ship's head off the wind and swell. The vessel, in company with several others, virtually tacked up the Straits of Taiwan from the coast of mainland China to the coast of Taiwan and back again. This, of course, was fuel-consuming without attaining many miles towards our destination.

Fuel remains on October 13 were 178.6 tons and I estimated that with the compromise courses we would have to steer the distance to Shanghai was 600 miles plus. The weather forecasts for the immediate area and the areas ahead promised even more severe weather conditions. Gale force winds were forecast for all areas. The adverse current was running exceedingly strongly (having been accentuated by the strong NE winds; and I estimated that our passage speed would not be in excess of four knots at the permissible rpm. After conferring with my senior officers I informed head office of the situation and, on October 14, upon receipt of their reply, I altered course for Hong Kong.

If these conditions persist (and there are no indications that they have eased in the past 24 hours) I would estimate that our passage time from Hong Kong to Shanghai might well be in the region of 10 to 11 days. At a draft forward of nine feet this vessel will always tend to pound when heading into seas generated by winds of force five or more and I have little hope that the winds of the XE Monsoon will be less than force five for the majority of the passage.

The vessel has not suffered any major structural damage and soundings reveal that the hull is still tight. During the stay in Hong Kong the opportunity will be taken to re-secure the vessel for a further period of adverse weather.

In concluding this report I would wish to mention the manner in which the officers of *Clan Maclachlan* have carried out their duties during this worrying and difficult period. If I make special mention of the bridge watchkeeping officers and the radio officer it is only because their efforts were more apparent to me.

Footnote: Clan Maclachlan arrived in Shanghai on October 23, after a rough passage but without mishap. She was well ahead of the deadline for delivery to the China National Machinery Import & Export Corp., Peking.

Work then commenced to break her up and she was scrapped.

The Yellow flag Bible.



All - well most - of us remember the days when, prior to entering the confines of a port the yellow "Q" flag was hoisted to tell the Port Authorities that the vessel was "healthy" and thus requested "free pratique". Today's speedy communications appear to have made the flag redundant for that purpose.

Many years ago, before the introduction of the International Code of Signals, it was all very different and in the days when plague raged globally there was an official "ceremony" that had to be undertaken by Masters of ships arriving from suspect ports before the vessel could berth. A Customs official would row out to meet the ship with a metal box holding the "Quarantine Book for the use of Surveyors", part of which contained the New Testament, hence the name "Plague Bible". The box would be hauled aboard and the Master would swear "on the book" an oath that the vessel was clear of any disease -and sign a declaration that that effect. The box and book were then returned to the waiting official and the vessel was free to dock. To ensure that the box and book had not been contaminated by contact with the ship the watertight box was dipped into the sea for a few minutes before being taken ashore.

The term "quarantine" has various origins but the old French word "quarantine" ("period of forty days") would appear to be the first with the current word derived from the Italian "quarantina" ("forty days").

Quarantine was first introduced at Venice as a measure of protection against plague and leprosy by a Council of Health held in the maritime city in 1374. The port was the principal trading centre for the Mediterranean and was at risk from infection by vessels arriving from Eastern ports. In 1377, Ragusa (Dubrovnik) followed suit (followed by Marseille some six years later) but it was many years later (the 18th-century) that England enacted any quarantine regulations. The most feared disease was the plague spread to humans by the bite of a rat-flea that had been living on an infected rat ...and, as rats were carried by ships trading worldwide the disease was easily distributed. After the disastrous epidemics of earlier times the 18th and 19th centuries saw a decline in global infection (with the exception of China) and just as it was thought that it had been controlled, 1894 saw a fresh outbreak in Hong Kong, spreading to Japan, Australia, The Americas, Egypt, Africa, The West Indies and a few European ports.

I well recall seeing huge rats running up and down the after mooring ropes of a Victory ship in Durban (operated by a well-established American company.) The rat guards had fallen off and were dangling from the taut ropes - and the vermin were having a ball!!

CRK 3.11.2019 (with acknowledgements "Nautical Magazine 1984")

New Members

Melissa Amy Plumley works in airline training and is a Pilot Careers Adviser. She has enjoyed attending many Club functions with her father Robin and joins us to promote more diversity in the Club.

Victoria Jane Yelland is a retired Registered Nurse with interests in Maritime and Military history. Also the Cruise Industry, in which she worked for 34 years. She has attended several Club functions with her friend Sally Redfearn and considers seafarers as like an extended family.

Dr. Simon Daniels is a Marine Lawyer and rejoins us after a few years absence. Simon compiled "We Sail The Ocean Blue" which was published by the Club to celebrate our 60th Jubilee in 1988. He subsequently wrote and published "The Wake of the Cachalots" (1993) and "The Master Mariners of Southampton" (2003, our 75th anniversary). All three publications contained many contributions from Cachalots, past and present. We are pleased to welcome Simon back on board.



New building for SSC

Staff Captain Andrew Moll, Chairman of Trustees of the Southampton Sea Cadets, addresses the assembled VIPs, Sea Cadets and guests at the official opening of their new building at Vespasian Road on 28th Sept.

The First Sea Lord, Admiral Tony Radakin, cut the tape in the presence of the Mayor, Cllr Peter Baillie, and some of the previous Mayors who have supported the project. Representatives of organisations and companies who have also supported it were present too, including The Cachalots.

Capt. Moll's message is summed up below.

The Sea Cadet Experience

The value of youth organisations working with young people is much documented and the expansion project, aimed at doubling the capacity of the Southampton Sea Cadet Unit, helps fulfil this need in the local area. Present and prior cadets have demonstrated and advised that they have become happier and more confident, and better behaved as a result of being a sea cadet. The values of loyalty, honesty, integrity, respect, commitment and self-discipline are instilled into the cadets. This helps reduce social problems in the neighbourhood and enables them to achieve more in the future. Research by the Marine Society and Sea Cadets (MSSC), the umbrella organisation for all sea cadet units, indicates that: 94% of sea cadets value the skills they acquire while part of the organisation; 66% of cadets have improved school attendance and grades; and, 88% of cadets confirm that it helps them secure employment on leaving school. Parents have stated that the Southampton Sea Cadet Unit has given their son/daughter a purpose and focus and has helped them stay out of trouble. The MSSC is positive and supportive of Southampton's expansion project as it meets their aims. Following its expansion, the Unit will continue to deliver the current range of activities, but the new facilities will allow for improvements that create more interaction and participation. Specifically, the new facilities, with more teaching, storage and display space available, will allow the cadets to participate in more projects, such as protecting the marine environment (e.g. March on plastic in the seas) and other relevant topics. The increased boat storage area will make it possible for the Unit to acquire more rowing, sailing and power boats, and kayaks & canoes to ensure cadets gain as much 'on water' time as possible to enhance their proficiency and acquire recognised national governing body* qualifications. With more drill space, the Unit's marching band (which appears at local events and charity fundraising concerts) can expand and offer more opportunity for local young musicians. The improved kitchen will enhance the cooking, food handling and catering safety tuition and practice the Cadets can receive, but it will also allow for sociable meal eating together during training or weekend activities. All courses, including participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, are heavily subsidised, ensuring that the Sea Cadet experience is accessible to all.

* *Royal Yachting Association (RYA), British Rowing, and British Canoeing*

Southampton launch of GCME v2

The local launch of the new NI publication took place at the Sailors' Society in East Street on 17th October.

Commenting on the success of the previous volume of Guidelines for Collecting Marine Evidence, Director of Publishing Bridget Hogan suggested, tongue-in-cheek, that if mariners paid as much attention to other NI publications on safety and safe-practice, then such post-incident guidelines might not be so necessary.

Pictured: Back Row: John Noble (Technical Editor), Richard North (MAIB), Jack Hatcher (Joint Technical Editor)

Front Row: Anna Snowdon, Bridget Hogan, Melanie Warman (Sailors' Society), Jeremy Smart (contributor) and Phil MacAllister (NI Production team)



The Admiral of the Port's Trafalgar Dinner

The dinner, the third such organised by us, and the second to be held at Grand Café, went well and was enjoyed by the 118 who were present. After a Reception held in the splendid lobby of South Western House, the Mayoral party processed through to the Top Table, led by the Town Sergeant carrying the Silver Oar of Admiralty. The Mayor was followed by one of the Southampton Sea Cadets, bearing his own Admiral's Flag.



Introduced by Staff Captain Andrew Moll, Councillor Peter Baillie, the Mayor and Admiral, made a short speech and described some of Southampton's connections to the battle. He had brought with him some pictures and artefacts from the City's own collection, including an original copy of The Times which reported the battle. Captain Moll then made his appeal on behalf of the Southampton Sea Cadets, repeating his 'Envelope-Money-Place card' directions for us confused-elderly and the hard-of-understanding. He also gave 'The Nelson Grace' in lieu of our Hon Member, The Rev'd Reg Sweet, who was unwell on the day.

The meal that followed was excellent and substantial, a world away from that enjoyed on the mess decks of the Victory, I'll wager, even if she was reportedly a 'good feeder'.

Our President, Captain Kelso, gave the Second Grace and Captain Moll 'The Queen' and after a short interval it was time for the Guest Speaker, Commodore Richard Farrington CBE, who gave us the most lucid and vivid description of the build up to, and of the battle itself that I, for one, have ever heard. It evoked in one the feeling of actually being on those gun decks, amid the noise, the blood and the terror. It also instilled a deep admiration, not only of Nelson and the men of his fleet but also of those modern day naval men who strive to keep that spirit and ethos afloat. When he proposed the toast to the Immortal Memory we stood and drank in silence, as is the tradition.

(Funny lot, these RN chaps, stand for

Nelson but not for the Queen? No doubt Captain Moll will enlighten us next year.)



Then the Prize Draw. The envelope collection had produced £1095 and there was a further £155 donated previously, making a total of £1250 raised towards the SSC funds.

The latest iPad, kindly donated once again by the Southampton Shipowners' Association, was the prize and the winning place-card was drawn from the drum by the Mayoress, Mrs Kim Baillie. It belonged to Ken Edwards guest, the Master of the *Red Kestrel*, Red Funnel's latest ro-ro freight ferry.

It was then time for the shanties and the Portsmouth Shantymen led us through the repertoire in rousing style. They had even written three extra verses to 'Drunken Sailor' which included references to the Cachalots and to our motto 'In all things ready and prepared'. A great end to a great evening.



But now for the bottom line. We had all had a jolly good time and sung like jolly sailors and drunk up our full bumpers but we were sadly down on the numbers required to make this a viable event.

The costings and ticket price were based on last years attendance, when we were assured of enough support to make it an annual event. But we didn't get that support, not from our own members nor from the wider maritime community. We had reduced from 200 at the football stadium to 150 at Grand Café. To have a private function and exclusive use of the venue then we have to pay for those minimum numbers. The number of ticket sales fell critically short and it resulted in us making a loss which cannot be repeated. If we fail to drum up sufficient support we will have to downsize again to a different venue.



Learning from the past

Lloyd's List Viewpoint 7 November 2019

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

There is a lot of interest in the ancestors these days, facilitated by TV programmes in which famous folk get very emotional after they have been appraised that one of their forebears was transported for sheep stealing. It is a lot easier to probe into the family past, helped by electronic rolls and specialist websites. Whether we actually learn very much about society in those distant days, as we tend to view everything through our prism of contemporary life, I somehow doubt.

You can, however, gain an insight into your ancestor's lives the traditional way, which is a lot harder; ploughing through correspondence and records, arguably a process that is very valuable and satisfying, but possibly doomed to disappear in the age of instant electronic communications. It was a point made only recently by the journalist and biographer Charles Moore, who has just completed the mammoth task of writing Margaret Thatcher's biography. But the lives of ordinary people can provide as much interest and instruction as those of the great.

These thoughts occurred to me after reading a beautiful book about the last chapter of deep water sailing ships and the life and times of Captain John Isbester, born in Shetland in 1856 and who died in 1913, when his ship was abandoned off the coast of Chile. Written by his grandson Captain Jack Isbester, who sailed with British & Commonwealth ships for many years before becoming a consultant, it is a wonderful insight into a maritime world that can still teach us a great deal about seafarers and seafaring, shipping and the sea.

Captain Jack acts as narrator and guide through the life of his ancestor, which is illuminated by an astonishing archive of letters and postcards which John Isbester wrote to his wife Susie, who kept them throughout her own long life and handed them down to her younger son, Jack's father. He then husbanded them carefully, adding to the story and building the archive further, before passing it to his son Jack.

John was 47 years at sea, more than 30 of them spent in command, at a time when mechanical propulsion and the short cut of the Suez Canal, was firmly relegating sail to the tramp trades and poor-paying bulk cargoes. Ships were run cheaply, although Captain John was fortunate in working for a respectable and responsible Liverpool management firm, which didn't exactly splash the cash, but did not stint on maintenance and seemed to have recognised a good shipmaster when they found one.

These were hard Victorian people, in hard Victorian times. Susie had eight children in their bleak Shetland home, although four of them died in infancy. She sailed with her husband on a number of voyages and for her part, she is an excellent reporter. Captain John writes well, although it is noted by the author that in some of his letters, dashed off in time to catch the pilot, the spelling was sometimes a trifle remiss.

What was it like to sail in those wind-driven ships? In his letters home, he comments to his wife about the competence of his mates, his frustrations with crews who would drink themselves insensible and desert at the drop of a hat when the ship arrived in port. It enables us to flesh out the lives encapsulated in log-book accounts, which tell of each day's sailing and the work done on board. We learn of the community of Shetlanders who would be found in ports around the world and aboard other ships. An observant passenger, whose accounts of a long voyage with Captain John have surfaced, reveals something of the character of this long-serving shipmaster. It appears that he was a firm but cheerful commander, who took infinite pains to train his apprentices, but stood no nonsense from recalcitrant crew members.

In an era before health and safety regulations, life at sea was dangerous, and more so under sail. Captain John lost three ships – one by stranding after an anchor failed to hold, one burned and his final command, the big steel ship *Dalgonar* was abandoned after ferocious weather knocked her down and shifted the ballast, when running between two ports on the West coast of South America. The captain and three of his crew were lost, although the rescue of the survivors by a French vessel was an act of great courage and seamanship.

What shines out of this account is the fortitude of that generation of seafarers and their dependents, the insecurity of the life they lived when casual labour was king and the utter isolation for months on end. It might seem appalling to us to read that Susie only knew of the death of her husband, after the loss of the ship appeared in Lloyd's List. But communications, even with the world mostly joined up by telegraph, was difficult and expensive. Modern masters, bedevilled by endless emails and angry charterers on the end of the phone, might have different ideas, but the anguish of finding no mail waiting after a 90 day passage, and worrying about those at home, is reflected in some of these messages across the years.

Some things don't change. Modern masters will warm to Captain John's frustrations at the shore side management – "the office doesn't understand", but will also appreciate the need for leadership, decisiveness and the knowledge of the sea built up over a lifetime, that ironically, was to kill him, when an anticipated fair weather passage turned lethal. Unexpectedly fierce weather is not just a feature of "climate change".

"Hard down! Hard Down!"* (the master's loud command to a helmsman in a squall) is a wonderful piece of work, illuminating the final years of sail in an accomplished fashion, accompanied by maps, diagrams and a clear explanation about the ships, the cargoes and how they were sailed. If I hadn't already read it, I would ask for it for Christmas.

**Hard down!Hard Down! The life and times of Captain John Isbester from Shetland, by Captain Jack Isbester, is published by Whittles Publishing ISBN 978-1-84995-402-0, price £18.99.*

rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk



Commander Roger Keyzor RD*RNR.

Roger was born in 1941 into a "seafaring" family in Wickham, Hampshire, his father being a submariner and both his grandfathers seafarers.

At the age of 16 he joined BP and the *SS British Industry* as a Navigating Apprentice, leaving BP in 1966 - some three years after marrying Wendy and becoming a father of two. He then served as Mate of a dredger, leaving in 1967 to take his family to Brasil where he served on submarine cable repair ships. Returning to the UK in 1969, he served on Solent ferries, as Mate, before obtaining Masters in 1970 - and joining the RNR.

1978 saw him serving in cross-channel ferries until 1987 when he was appointed Harbourmaster of Ilfracombe, N.Devon, before moving to Bristol as Docks Operations Manager. The sad death of Wendy in 1991 saw Roger, Rich and Sarah move back to Gosport where he joined P&O Car Ferries, subsequently returning to IOW car ferries as Master. He married Carolyn in 1995 and, in 2003, retired after (to quote his son, Rich) "46 years in and around floating objects"!

Roger became a Cachalot in 2005.



The CACHALOTS

The Southampton Master Mariners' Club

**1st Floor, Southampton Royal British
Legion Club, Eastgate Street
SOUTHAMPTON, SO14 3HB**

Tel: 023 8022 6155

Web site: www.cachalots.org.uk

E-mail: office@cachalots.org.uk

captain@cachalots.org.uk
staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk
boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk
storekeeper@cachalots.org.uk
postcaptain@cachalots.org.uk
functions@cachalots.org.uk
membership@cachalots.org.uk
editor@cachalots.org.uk

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

Thu	7 Nov	Sale of Sea Pie Supper tickets
Sat	9 Nov	Curry Lunch, Kuti's Royal Pier
Sat	7 Dec	Christmas Lunch, MedBar
Thu	2 Jan	Docklands New Year Service
Thu	9 Jan	AGM
Wed	22 Jan	Burns Supper
Sat	15 Feb	Curry Lunch, Kuti's
Fri	21 Mar	Skittles Evening

The cut-off date for the next edition will be

14th February 2020

250 Club

Sept	R. Faint	R. Plumley
Oct	R. Martin	I. Stirling