

# ***The CACHALOT***

**THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB**

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## Captain's Log

The Editor has been badgering me for the traditional Captain's Column, but these are lean times for your newly appointed Club Captain, with thin pickings to be had.

My time in office started well at the Sea Pie Supper, with some warm words from Captain Rachel Dunn as she slipped the Club Captain's chain of office (a.k.a. the noose) round my neck. We had nearly 500 diners, excellent food, and no-one missed the band until it came time to sing the National Anthem. Views about the band have previously been mixed, with the most vocal being those unable to hear a word their fellow diners were saying while the band was in full flow. So, it was with some trepidation that the decision was made to go band-free for a year to test the waters. Feedback is still coming in, but the trial seems to have been a success so this could be the model going forwards. Finally, fund-raising for my charity of the year got off to a fine start as the lady who won her table's sweepstake for guessing the length of the guest of honour's speech kindly donated her winnings. For those not there, the Captain's charity this year is Southampton Sea Cadets, but I am sure you will hear more about them from me as the year progresses.

My one and only opportunity to represent the Club has been at the Honourable Company of Master Mariners' (HCCM) Court Luncheon, held on HQS Wellington on Wed 4 March. It was also the occasion of my first dressing down during my time in office, for being out of the rig of the day. The dress code on the letter clearly said lounge suit, with no mention of costume jewellery, but I am indebted to Captain Douglas Gates for pointing out the error of my ways in neglecting to wear my official regalia. What I can report back from the Court Luncheon is that, while not itself a livery company, the Southampton Master Mariners Club can hold its head up high. We might not have the membership of the HCMM, but we are

well known and respected, and our club is accessible to those actually working in the industry in a way that HCMM cannot emulate.

I recall at our committee meeting on 12 March discussing whether or not to cancel the forthcoming skittles evening, and looking back we had no inclination of what was about to befall the country. Since then, the skittles evening and curry lunches have gone by the wayside, and with heavy hearts the Winchester Shipping Festival service has also been cancelled. It is too early to say when normal service will be resumed, but using my work diary as a barometer seems to indicate that everything until the summer will be cancelled or postponed, with people hoping that life will be back to normal by the autumn.

From a personal perspective, life at the Marine Accident Investigation Branch continues, but working remotely seems to take twice as long. Consequently, it is probably a good thing that the accident rate has fallen by about 60% since the lock-down was imposed. This is hardly a surprise. The cruise business has all but shut down; ferry traffic is significantly reduced as without the need to carry passengers most operators have reduced their sailings; and, of course, the leisure boating season has been put on hold. Perhaps a surprising casualty of the virus has been the fishing industry, with many boats not sailing because the owners/skippers cannot sell their catch, the fish markets having closed down due to the virus. Please spare a thought for those in our industry whose livelihoods have been put on the line for the virus.

On the positive side, many are taking the opportunity of the lock-down for some self-development if they have time on their hands. I know many of our members are also members of the Solent branch of the Nautical Institute (NI), so will already be aware of their latest initiative. For those that are not, our local Branch is emulating the wider NI *Join the Conversation* initiative, to stimulate discussion on 'hot topics'. They have agreed to Cachalot members taking part, and the first topic get an airing is: '*Pilot ladder safety has become a provocative subject of late in industry press, with many examples of poor rigging and management of the transfer process being brought to the industry forum. How would you promote improvements in this area to uplift safety in this respect?*'

Details of how to participate follow in the newsletter, and all contributions are welcome.

I normally sign off by inviting people to ‘stay safe’. I think this time ‘stay well’, seems more appropriate.

Captain Andrew Moll



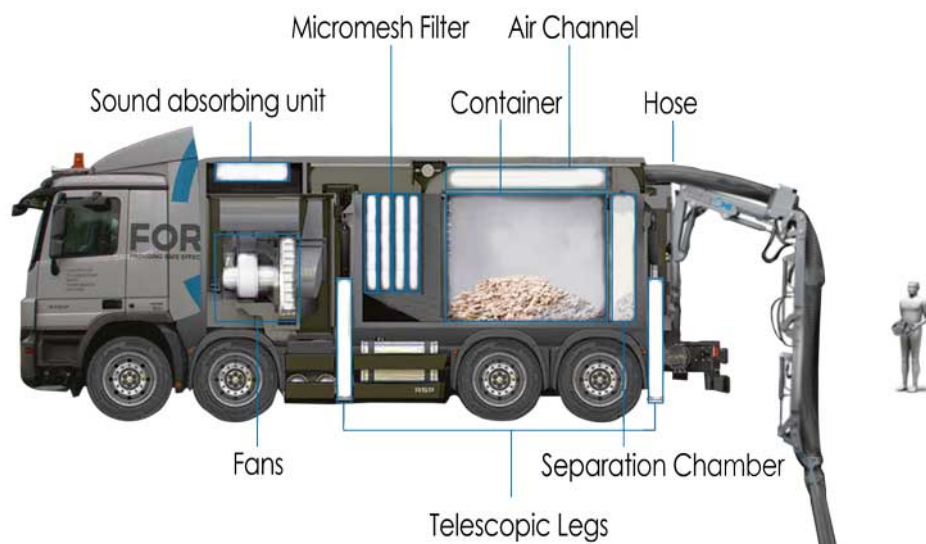
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## Boatsteerer's Locker

Since our last Cachalot Newsletter - a few days after our Sea Pie Supper in February - I needed some rest and recuperation to recover so we flew off to the Costa Blanca to a SAGA Hotel (yes - we just qualify on age) for two weeks in the sun with an inclusive bar! I returned refreshed and ready to deal with the Shipping Festival Service and any other problem. While we were away I missed Barry Peck's talk on 'Cable Ships' and am looking for other volunteers. We had only been home a week or two before something worse than the dreaded lurgy struck Spain, good job we weren't there for four weeks.

Amongst the mail waiting on our return was a letter from Scottish & Southern Power stating that they would shortly be renewing the electrical cable in our estate as over the years we have had unexpected electrical blackouts which prompted digging up sections of road or pavement looking for a fault. We live on a small 60 house/bungalow cul de sac estate on a hill on the outskirts of Hythe at a place called Dibden which very few have heard of hence we say we live in Hythe. Work started beginning of March with the layout of the underground electric cable paint sprayed on the pavement and grass verge before work started up the hill and round the corner out of sight.. As we are near the bottom of the hill we were the last cul de sac to be affected. Suddenly the workmen arrived not with picks and shovels but in a huge lorry which was in fact a suction trench digger operated by a workman with a remote control similar to my grandson's Xbox one.





Within a day the trench was dug (sucked) down to the faulty cable and supervised from my bedroom window with the Boatsteerer's telescope. The following day a new cable was manhandled and laid adjacent to the old cable. On 27th the great day arrived, a switch was pulled for 45 minutes for the final main connection, then all power came back on.

The following day the trench was filled in and we now await the grass to sprout – job done.

My next excitement will be when the weekly the bin men come !!

With the pre-Easter warm weather we threw a Garden Party for our neighbours, unfortunately they were all on self imposed isolation so we enjoyed the Pimms and entertained them through their windows with sea shanties.

With the panic buying of toilet rolls we have started rationing ourselves .



Have a Happy Lockdown

Ken Dagnall Boatsteerer

## From the Editor

Welcome to this first all digital edition of *The Cachalot*.

Due to the current lockdown, we are unable to produce and distribute a printed copy of our quarterly newsletter. Many of you are already used to receiving your copy as a pdf file, sent by email, and this edition will be published the same way and sent to all members who have supplied us with their email addresses (the current *Cachalite* distribution list). Unfortunately we are currently unable to access our office facilities and contact those 100 or so members for whom we only have postal addresses, to advise them of this development.

Without the constraints imposed in producing a paper edition we are able to increase the size of the print and improve the layout so as to make it more reader friendly for onscreen viewing, and include more pictures and graphics. No more limits on numbers of pages or their lengths and no more trying to squeeze a late submission into previously carefully laid out pages.

Also, those constraints included budgetary ones and the saving in printing and postal costs, as well as the relaxing of deadlines, will allow for a more frequent newsletter with more up to date content. Initial thoughts were for a bi-monthly issue but that could come down to monthly one. It all depends on the response to this digital initiative. I still need content but perhaps not to the extent that a 12 or 16 page printed magazine requires. On the technical side I need to keep the file size of the newsletter to within a size acceptable for sending and receiving by email but so far it looks promising.

My editorial stance remains that *The Cachalot* should be about and by Cachalot members. Just how much relevant news can be generated by a crew of old sea dogs confined to their cabins remains to be seen. The impact of these drastic lockdown measures will be far reaching and will affect the Club and all of us in many different ways. Our Boatsteerer is already reporting on the goings on in his street as observed through binoculars from his bedroom window. He will have to be careful that he doesn't get himself a reputation.

## Read it on your Kindle too

We can also send a copy direct to your Kindle device, as well as to your normal email address.

Each Kindle has its own registered e-mail address and to find yours go to Settings → My account. It will look like *your name* @kindle.com

Send this to me at [editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk) and I will add you to the Kindle distribution list.



## Writing Competition

Past Captain John Noble has come up with the following suggestion:  
"To help prevent us all going bonkers, I would like to sponsor a "for fun" writing competition. 500 to 1000 words on

**" How I kept myself sane during the Covid-19 scare".**

The prize will be a bottle of finest Malt whisky, generously donated by John

The competition will be judged by the three principal officers of the Club, the Club Captain, the Boatsteerer and the Storekeeper. Members are invited to submit entries to [captain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:captain@cachalots.org.uk) by 31st July. Word or Libre Office (odt) format please.

If you can't wait that long to share your words of wit and wisdom with us, why not write a piece for this newsletter? Or, if that seems too daunting, I am still waiting for the first contribution to the sadly neglected "Letters to the Editor" page. Believe me, you stand a much greater chance of being published here than in the Daily Telegraph. So here's your chance, amidst all the gloom and doom generated by the BBC and the press, to bring some cheer to your fellow Cachalots. Conversely, you may choose to be a bit controversial. Don't worry, we understand the frustrations of cabin fever and the urge to prod somebody with a big stick.

All contributions, comments, suggestions or constructive criticism to [editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk)



## Cachalot on LinkedIn

Following the announcement from the Prime Minister on 16<sup>th</sup> March, and the inevitable cancellation of events and closure of the club room an idea was circulated by email for the management committee. A suggestion was put forward to set up a group on LinkedIn. Having offered and agreed to take this forward it needed a quick session of research and learning to understand how!

The key aim was to develop an Unlisted group which only allows our own Cachalot members to access by invitation. Instructions to join were included in *Cachalite* No.161 dated 18 March. You will not see the group highlighted on LinkedIn unless you are a member so please follow the instructions replicated later in this article.

Terry kindly circulated a *Cachalite* to garner interest and we added some instructions as to how members could join the group. The groups aim was to provide a central forum for Cachalot members to stay in touch, especially during the current coronavirus epidemic.

At the time of writing this we have attracted 22 members with 7 Cachalots who are registered on LinkedIn and who have been invited but have not completed the final action of accepting the invitation.

I used the Cachalot emblem in place of the usual 'mugshot' and started the banner photo with an image I took at the Southampton Boat Show in 2019 of *SS Shieldhall*. I started a conversation to indicate I would change the photo header once a week, each Tuesday, and asked for members to send me a suitable image of a ship or an activity linked to their own maritime sector.

Barry Peck answered the call with an image of *CS Iris* which was posted on Tuesday 31 March. So far, I have received no more responses so unless any come along, the group will have to make do with images from my own collection!!!!

Hopefully, as a Cachalot member, you are reading this article in the digital edition of the Cachalot and I hope if you have not done so already you will be moved to come and join us. The instructions are included below.



To join the group:

1. Register with LinkedIn if you are not already a member.
2. Search for Captain Robin Plumley MBE
3. Send me a Connect request. There should be a box on his page or you might find it under 'More'.
4. Once I have received your request, I will send you an Invitation to join the Group.

This is all very new to many of us so please be patient in the event of unforeseen wrinkles.

Important Club news will still be circulated using the *Cachalite* e-bulletin system.

If in any doubt or require assistance please email me at [robinplumley@outlook.com](mailto:robinplumley@outlook.com)



## Solent Branch Discussion

Further to our Captain's remarks in his Log, it was local NI member Donald Donaldson who suggested this initiative. Richard Brooks, Secretary of the NI Solent Branch and a fellow Cachalot, writes:

*The Solent Branch has the benefit of a vast array of expertise and experience amongst its membership. With the Solent area hosting some of the key entities of the UK Maritime Industry, and many of our members coming from such backgrounds, from operators to accident investigators, pilots to policy makers and of course, to the all important seafarers among our ranks, this skillset is wide ranging and in depth in knowledge. This, coupled with the engaging debate which we see so often at branch events is what makes our branch stand out. At this time, when it is not appropriate to bring the branch together to hold face to face events, it poses a challenge,*

*but we're keen to keep members engaged, talking, and of course to keep the hotbed of debate and contribution we enjoy at events running.*

*Our proposal, and provided there is take up from members, is to form something along the lines of the 'Join the Conversation' pages of Seaways until branch activities can recommence. How would it work?:*

- A discussion topic or statement is sent out to members. This would be something current, topical, and likely to spark some varied views - the greater the range the better!*
- Members would reply with a brief paragraph on their stance and thoughts on the subject by email, including their name or clearly stating anonymous if they wish*
- At regular intervals, these will be compiled and published to the membership for their digest, along with the next topic for discussion responses*

*The first subject for your thoughts is:*

*' Pilot ladder safety has become a provocative subject of late in industry press, with many examples of poor rigging and management of the transfer process being brought to the industry forum. How would you promote improvements in this area to uplift safety in this respect?'*

*Please submit responses to [nisolentdiscussion@outlook.com](mailto:nisolentdiscussion@outlook.com)*

*We hope that the idea is of interest to you, and encourage you to get engaged and keep this branch active at this time where social distancing measures require us to get a little more inventive on electronic platforms. Let's keep the branch debate running together!*

If you are not a member of the NI but wish to receive the regular digest you will need to submit your email address to Richard at the above link.

There is a link to the Branch website on our own website, or [Here](#)



# Giant ships, big diseases

## **Seatrade-Maritime Opinion & Analysis February 2020**

One wonders, as the size and capacity of cruise ships mushroomed, and the various lines proudly unveiled their latest mammoth vessel, with all its outrageous attractions, anyone gave much thought to the prospect of the thousands of souls aboard contracting a seriously contagious disease. Well, you might say, norovirus and various similar problems have been with us for some time and all cruise ships carry a fully trained medical staff, with proper protocols to contain any outbreaks.

But did anyone consider an outbreak of something really nasty among the embarked populations, in some cases resembling that of a small town, as the designers competed to extrapolate ship sizes to something nobody ever imagined twenty years ago? It makes you wonder, but just as fear of catastrophic loss didn't stop people building 23,000 teu containerships, the economies of scale always seem to triumph. Potential reward from super-size will invariably cancel out any doubts about putting too many eggs in one basket.

While shipwreck, fire, foundering and flood can be anticipated along with other marine risks and suitable precautions taken, it takes an unusual degree of pessimism (or forethought) to imagine a 5000 berth cruise ship in the eye, not of a hurricane, but something which could become a pandemic. What conceivable drill can you practice, even on the biggest desktop?

Well, everyone is learning now and it is not difficult to sympathise with the resolution of port authorities in the Far East as giant cruise ships, which may or may not be harbouring coronavirus, amid the thousands of passengers and crew, seek to enter harbour. It is the sheer number of potential problems, all contained in a single huge hull, that makes permission to enter port a bold decision. Unless things are really desperate, and large numbers of your nationals are embarked, it is far easier to deny the master the pratique he seeks.

One has to feel for the masters of these monsters, prime navigators at the peak of their professions, at what fate and the curious habits of mutating viruses, has thrown at them. The duties of a shipmaster of a vessel

approaching a port from overseas, as they relate to the Declaration of Health are quite explicit, it being the master's responsibility to "ascertain the state of health of all persons on board" and answer questions relating to this matter. The declaration will be countersigned by the ship's surgeon, but it is the master's responsibility, as is the health of all aboard.

One wonders what might have prepared a cruise ship master as he ascended the ladder to the lonely summit of peak responsibility, for such an eventuality as is being faced by those wondering whether their complements are contaminated, and whether a port will let them dock. He or she probably remembers questions in professional examinations about pratique procedures, and how to ascertain whether there is infectious disease aboard. In my day the authorities were particularly interested in "suspected cases of plague, cholera, yellow fever, typhus fever or smallpox" but I dare say the areas of interest will have considerably widened by now. We were exhorted to be very alert to "unusual mortality among the rats". I cannot believe this would be an issue aboard a deeply cleaned cruise ship.

But hopefully from this outbreak, which we pray will be mercifully brief, some best practice which will be of use to hard-pressed masters in the future will emerge. Quite how you clean and make completely safe a ship which has had this disease aboard will also exercise the minds of owners, if they wish to attract future passengers. After the deepest of deep cleaning, you possibly might think about a name change.

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[www.seatrade-maritime.com](http://www.seatrade-maritime.com) and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

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# Covid 19 afloat

## A Pilot's view

Like me, most of you have travelled all over the world on various ships, visiting exotic places.

It all sounds very exciting (and of course, parts of it were). Much of it, however, was incredibly dreary - being isolated on a small ship, with poor food, small crews which had nothing in common with each other (on occasions including no common language) and little in the way of communication with home, way



before the internet/mobile phones/satellite TV and so on. In short, I used to dream of having the ability to eat pretty much what I wanted, to be able to go into the garden, talk with likeminded people etc.

Thus, all my training was brilliant in preparing me for this present situation of Social Distancing. However, not everyone that I have met over the last few weeks has been nearly as lucky. Worldwide trade continues, and, although imports and exports are down, we are still having at least 10 ships (and often more) coming into the port every day. Almost half of these are berthing at Fawley where the refining of crude oil is of strategic importance for so many things in our lives.

Most of the crews that I encounter are having a terrible time. They are not allowed ashore in any of the countries that they visit. Due to international travel restrictions, many of them can't be relieved, so they are spending many more months away from home than they should, so they are fatigued, stressed and worried about their families at home. On the other hand, they themselves are some of the safest people, as they have been compulsorily isolated for several months. The crew that would normally relieve them have a different problem, as many companies only pay when the people are actually on the ship.

I (and all 40 Southampton Pilots) have had our own challenges. Whilst we are very aware of the need to protect ourselves, family and colleagues from Covid 19, we also keenly feel the need to assist our fellow seamen. Some of the ships (particularly the cruise ships) declare that they have possible cases on board before they arrive at a port. Many of the ports have refused them entry.

I recently piloted a cruise ship which had been refused berths everywhere between the Caribbean and Southampton. After much discussion and planning, it was decided that I should pilot her in, suitably attired in protective clothing, as pictured. I have never been made more welcome on a ship (and can happily report that the protective gear all seemed to work and I have no unwanted symptoms a fortnight after the event).



Interestingly, over the last few weeks, due to the various crews' enforced isolation, the reverse has now happened and when I board, I am more likely to be a threat to them than the other way around. Thus, I carry all the protective gear, sanitiser, wipes etc. and just don whatever the Captain requests for mutual safety, whilst cleaning any piece of ship's equipment that I may need to use.

Noel Becket

12 April '20

# Lessons to be learned

Seatrade Maritime    Analysis and Opinion    April 2020

“How on earth did they manage to do that?” Such might have been an appropriate reaction upon watching that spectacular Facebook record of the container ship demolishing half the cranes in a South Korean port earlier this month. [gCaptain-Milano Bridge-Busan](#) . It is a good question, but whether we will ever have it answered will depend upon the transparency with which any investigation into the incident is carried out and also the promulgation of the results.

It is a sad fact that it is still only a minority of serious marine accidents which are properly investigated in a forensic fashion and then reported on in a way that will enable others to learn from them. It is a duty of flag states which contract to the IMO Convention, but all too often this obligation is honoured in the breach – that is ignored. There are even significant flag states which cannot be bothered to inquire into casualties involving their ships, let alone make any results public. There is a regular reminder from the IMO Secretary-General on such matters, but it doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference.

There is important – even vital – information revealed in such reports, if they are undertaken properly. In the old shipping company I sailed with, we would get such reports mailed to our ships and we watch-keeping officers would be required to both read them and initial an accompanying sheet, to show we had taken the lessons on board. On one ship, I recall the master referring them as the “There but the grace of God go I - reports”. And in those days, when blame was regarded as more important than causation, it was always somebody's fault – the guilty party invariably losing his certificate.

Today, the statistics reveal that there really are fewer accidents, but there is no shortage of reading matter made available for everyone's improvement. Just last week, locked down because of the dreaded virus, I was delighted that the postman brought two such valuable publications. There was the latest Safety Digest from the UK Marine Accident Investigation Branch, every one of the incident reports offering some food for thought. The same post brought the Annual Report of CHIRP – the Confidential Hazardous



Incident Reporting Programme, in which it is possible to detect trends and with a lot of useful information and observations drawn from these. And there are still the “good guys” – those flag states which publish regular reports into individual incidents and indeed summarise the lessons they think should be learned aboard ships flying their flags – and those who manage them. There is plenty to educate anyone with an open mind.

It is well worth reading such reports, because they very often give clues to bad operational habits that may not necessarily have led directly to the accident happening, but may have been a possible contributor. As an example I would offer the sad number of small ships that come to grief when a single watch-keeper has allowed his or her attention to wander. One case in the latest MAIB Safety Digest, tells of some chap who was watching a film on his mobile for most of his watch, with the ship grounding close to an enormous lighthouse. He was also deaf to the urgent calls on the VHF of a shore station monitoring the ship’s position, which leads one to believe that he was also asleep, comfortable in his “posture-perfect” chair, with which the owners had equipped their vessel.

In my day it was practically a death sentence if the Master had found the watch keeper sitting down on a night watch, as he knew, as did we, that the last thing one should do in the middle of the night was to sit down, even for a minute. Today they have alarms, but often seem to be switched off before the accident and the fatal chairs are everywhere.

Read these reports carefully, and you will find other things that nag at the brain. There was a recent collision between, of all things, a VLCC and a big LNG carrier, both fortunately empty, but with a lot of bent steel. The excellent report by the flag state of one of the “combatants” attributed the accident to the misuse and misunderstanding of VHF. But the attentive reader might just have noticed that the Master of the gas carrier had been at sea for only a dozen years, two of which had been spent in command. Fast promotion through the ranks caused by shortages is known to be a growing problem, but here writ large, if not immediately obvious, is one of the consequences. It is, if you like, another reason why such reports matter.

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**[www.seatrade-maritime.com/](http://www.seatrade-maritime.com/) and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey**  
***jmgrey@dircon.co.uk***

## How the work of the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) makes a difference

For over 30 years, the Marine Accident Investigation Branch (MAIB) has focussed on preventing the re-occurrence of accidents at sea. In his summing up following his public inquiry into the 1987 *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, Lord Justice Sheen recommended that future inquiries into maritime disasters to be conducted by experts. Using the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) template, the government established a marine equivalent, which started work in 1989. Like the AAIB, the MAIB is part of the Department for Transport but is functionally independent for the purposes of accident investigation. The sole aim of an MAIB investigation is the prevention of future accidents. Of the 1200 or so marine accidents and incidents recorded by the Branch each year, around 30 merit full investigation resulting in a publicly available report and, when appropriate, recommendations aimed at preventing a re-occurrence.

When the Branch was established, the Chief Inspector (*Captain Peter Marriott, who was Captain of the Club in 2007*) had wide discretion to decide what to investigate, and in the main the Branch investigated those accidents that offered the greatest scope for useful safety recommendations. In 2010, the IMO Casualty Investigation Code (CIC) came into force, which mandated that States investigate Very Serious Marine Casualties. These were defined as accidents involving SOLAS vessels that resulted in the loss of a ship or life, or serious pollution. In 2011, the EU's Accident Investigation Directive (AID) came into force that brought other ships within scope including, for example, fishing vessels more than 15m in length. The effect on the MAIB was that around a third of the Branch's investigations became non-discretionary. If the accident involved a vessel in scope of the CIC or AID, and had 'very serious' consequences, it had to be investigated and a report published.

Although many investigations are mandated, the MAIB has retained the latitude and capacity to investigate less serious accidents and incidents, when it believes that safety lessons can be learned.

One such area is the UK fishing industry. While the fatality rate is very gradually reducing, in 2018 commercial fishing was still the most dangerous in the UK, and it was 10 times more hazardous than the next most dangerous industry (recycling). Although the EU only requires the UK to investigate very serious accidents involving fishing vessels over 15m in length, around 80% of the UK's fishing fleet are under that size. To focus on improving fishing safety, in 2011 the Branch decided to investigate the deaths of all UK fishermen, whatever their vessel's length, and very serious fishing vessel accidents account for about a third of the Branch's investigative output. However, as the following case example illustrates, investigating fishing vessel accidents can sometimes have far reaching effects.

### *FV Louisa (SY30)*



Early on 9 April 2016, the 14.95m vivier creel boat *Louisa* foundered, with the loss of three of the four crew, while anchored close to the shore in Mingulay Bay in the Outer Hebrides. The crew, who had been working long hours before anchoring late the previous evening, had woken suddenly as the vessel was sinking rapidly by the bow. They escaped to the aft deck, activated the EPIRB and donned lifejackets, but were unable to inflate the liferaft as they abandoned the vessel.

When the Barra lifeboat arrived in Mingulay Bay, the lifeboat crew were able to assist one crewman, who had swum to shore and climbed onto

rocks, but the other three crewmen were found unresponsive and face down in the water despite wearing approved abandonment lifejackets.

The MAIB's investigation set out to answer three questions: why had FV *Louisa* sunk when, apparently, safely at anchor; why had the liferaft failed to inflate; and why had three crew wearing lifejackets not survived? Fortunately, the wreck was in shallow water and in good condition so it was raised and examined. In the event, no defects were found and we concluded that down flooding from the deck-wash hose, which had been left running when the crew turned-in, had been the cause. Testing showed that the liferaft inflation cylinder had not been filled at its last service, which is why it did not work when needed. Both issues were due to 'local' circumstances, but that the SOLAS lifejackets had failed to keep the crew's airways clear of the water was of a different magnitude.



MAIB 'guinea pigs' waiting for the chance to breathe.

Using inspectors as guinea pigs, we replicated an approximation of the SOLAS lifejacket approval test, and found that the *Louisa* lifejackets failed to turn an 'unconscious' casualty face upwards. Our guinea pigs had the sense to right themselves before they ran out of breath, but the point was made. The MAIB's final report, published in July 2017, recommended that that the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) carry out further tests, and that *"Any shortcomings in the water performance test requirements that*

*may be identified should be brought to the attention of the International Maritime Organization for action”.*

To cut a long story short, the MCA established that the Reference Test Device (RTD), used as the standard against which lifejackets are tested, did not sufficiently replicate the real world. Specifically, the larger the wearer and the more clothes they wore, the less likely it was that they would be turned the right way up. The MCA’s findings were written up, and after some negotiation a paper agreed by all EU Member States was put to the Maritime Safety Committee last year (MSC 101). The MSC approved the paper, added it to the 2020-21 biennial agenda, and it has also been added to the provisional agenda for the Ship Systems and Equipment Sub-Committee (SSE 7), which is scheduled to meet this Spring.

The MAIB’s recommendation triggered a process that taken nearly 4 years, and a revised lifejacket test standard is still some way off. The Branch has received some criticism for not being more forthright at the outset, but I would argue that there are no prizes for the fastest wrong answer. Changing the lifejacket test standard has wide-ranging implications for the marine industry; more so if retrospectively applied. Tragically, three fishermen lost their lives, but from the MAIB’s original accident investigation an evidence base has been built that has the potential to change the lifejackets carried by every SOLAS vessel, and all those to which SOLAS regulations are applied.

Not every MAIB investigation has such a wide impact. Many safety shortcomings can be addressed locally, and if the organisation / company responsible has taken appropriate steps before the Branch’s report is published then no recommendations are needed. Similarly, an accident does not need to result in very serious consequences for important safety lessons to be learned. We can always do better, but after 15 years at the MAIB I think we have the balance about right. Tragic accidents need answers, and that is our job, but if the UK wants to remain a champion of marine safety we must also protect and invest in our capacity to investigate where lives have not been lost but far reaching improvements to marine safety can be.

*To see just how comprehensive an in-depth MAIB report can be, you should visit: [MAIB Inv Report17\\_2017.pdf](#)*



# Southampton's SF Panther

**by Barry Peck**

In the 1960s and 1970s Southampton was the base for two subsidiary companies of P&O Ferries, Normandy and Southern Ferries. Normandy Ferries ran the Southampton to Le Havre route with the British flagged DRAGON and French flagged LEOPARD. Southern Ferries ran the Southampton to Lisbon, Algeciras and Tangier route with the EAGLE for four years, and the Southampton to Pasajes (near San Sebastian in Northern Spain) route for two years with SF PANTHER. The ships ran from the Princess Alexandra Dock, now of course the Ocean Village. Neither of the Southern Ferries routes proved profitable, hence the short time they lasted. Normandy Ferries route was profitable and lasted until absorbed by Townsend Thoresen.

The story of the SF PANTHER is in two halves which came together at the end of 1975.

In 1965 TT Linie of Hamburg built their first PETER PAN at Lubeck for their Baltic Travemunde – Trelleborg route. In view of the conditions of the route in winter she was Ice Class II which was to prove very useful eleven years later. By 1973 the traffic on the route had increased beyond the capacity of the ship and she was put up for sale, being bought in August 1973 by P&O Southern Ferries and renamed SF PANTHER to start a new route from Southampton to Pasajes in Northern Spain, operating from what was number three berth in the Princess Alexandra Dock.

The introduction of a route to Northern Spain was ahead of its time, and in addition the published schedule was too fast for the passage through the Bay of Biscay as the ship was not stabilized, and the ship was rarely on time, and by the autumn of 1975 it was decided to close the route. However, P&O Ferries had also decided to convert the Aberdeen – Lerwick route to ro-ro service and the vessel would be ideal for this, the only drawback being that the Aberdeen and Lerwick berths would not be ready until the spring of 1977. The vessel was therefore advertised for charter until March 1977.





Going back to 1961, Jens C Hagen's Da-No Line of Norway had started a route from Aarhus to Oslo which proved very popular. However, the vessel used, the Norwegian flagged HOLGAR DANSKE, was eventually too small, and in February 1974 Da-No shifted the ship to their Fredrickshaven – Oslo route. The Aarhus route was still viable and Da-No went into a partnership with J A Reineke of Hamburg with Da-No running the freight and passenger operation ashore and Reineke providing the ship and crew as ship operator. The ship was the first TERJE VIGEN, German flagged with German deck and engine officers and crew and the hotel services department multi-national, many off the international pool. The German flag and Hamburg registry were a mistake, as with memories of the 1940s still fresh many Scandinavian passengers would not use it. By the autumn of 1975 it was therefore decided to sell the ship and operate with chartered vessels. The ship was sold to Brittany Ferries and became their first ARMORIQUE.





This is where the two stories converged. P&O wanted to charter out the SF PANTHER and as Reineke was originally a partner in TT Linie they knew the ship well. The fact that Reineke and Da-No were in a partnership is the explanation why when this period has been written about it is normal for the charterer to be stated as Da-No, but that is not so. The charter was with Reineke as the ship operator. The ship went into a refit in Falmouth, including the fitting of stabilisers, and in December 1975 went to Aarhus as the second TERJE VIGEN.



The name comes from a poem written by Henrik Ibsen in 1862 based on a true story of a seaman on the Skagerrak during the Scandinavian war at the beginning of that century. The ship remained registered in Southampton and with the British deck and engine officers and crew. The hotel services crew transferred across with their stores and the ship took over the route, sailing from Aarhus at 1600 Thursday, Saturday and Monday, arriving Oslo at 0800 and sailing back 1600 Friday, Sunday and Tuesday. Wednesday was a layover day in Aarhus apart from July/August 1976 when sailings were daily.

With the combination of British and multi-national crews there was a potential conflict of cultures that could have resulted in a very poor onboard relationship. This was realized by both sides from the outset and immediate steps were taken to avoid it, a major item being the creation of a crew recreation room open to all, with all officers invited so long as they didn't wear braid. It was a great success and contributed to a very happy and efficient ship. There were also many

friendships formed with the Danes ashore in Aarhus.

The ship was a great success on the route, the sight of a Red Ensign flying over a Southampton registry being very popular with the Danes and Norwegians, and both passenger and freight bookings increased to levels previously unobtained. One time of note was the day Southampton won the FA Cup in 1976. While the match was in progress the ship was loading in Aarhus and the commentary was piped down on the car deck, intended of course for the crew. As the cars were loaded the passengers realized what was happening and were shaking hands with the crew and singing the “When the Saints go marching in” with them. Whilst it is impossible to quantify what the value of this atmosphere was, the charterers always made it clear how much they considered the importance of it was to them.

The winter of 1976 was particularly cold, with the Oslofjord frequently with a layer of ice that needed the ship’s Ice Class II construction to keep it running. Out in the open water of the Skagerrak spray shipped would freeze as it hit the bridge windows with the radar scanner frozen up and lookout kept through the clear view screens, and after one harsh night the forward lifeboats were frozen in their davits.

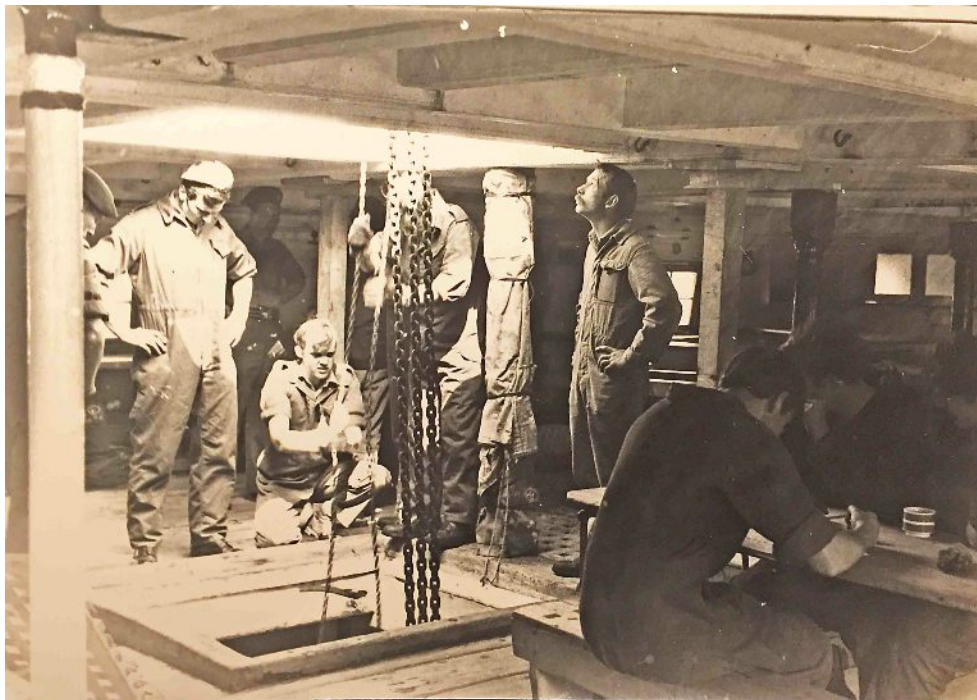


The charter ended in March 1977. The final sailing from Aarhus for the refit on the Tyne was seen off by a crowd of the local Danes that filled the waterfront. The ship went to Swan Hunter in South Shields for a major refit to convert her into the ST CLAIR for the Aberdeen – Lerwick route, which included items such as much larger car deck extractor fans to enable the carriage of livestock. The story of the ST CLAIR is of course a completely separate narrative.

Finally, it must be clear to the reader that much of the above cannot be found in records, so what part did the author play in all this? For much of 1975 I was sailing as Chief Officer on the DRAGON with Normandy Ferries. In the autumn I was moved to the SF PANTHER shortly before the end of the Pasajes run, and stayed with the ship throughout the Falmouth refit, the passage to Aarhus and the start of the Oslo route, and remained for the duration of the charter (with some leave of course!), the passage to the Tyne and the subsequent refit. More than forty years later I still remember with pleasure one of the happiest ships I have sailed on, the best team of deck officers and ratings I have had charge of, and some fine friends of varied nationalities both ashore and afloat, which in some cases I remain in contact with.



## [A Bit of History](#)



This is a photo of soldiers of 17 Port Regiment RCT taking the ballast of about 30 cannon out of the former HMS Trincomalee. This ship was launched in Bombay in 1817, so I doubt if even many of our older members can remember that occasion.

In 1972, 155 years later, we took the cannon out. The ship by this time had been renamed Foudroyant. (See *'Days of Yore Pt 2, Cachalot 72, or [here](#)* ).

The entire team was Army and we were given the task as we were the most suitable experts to do this tricky job. (And anyway we were free). The ship at that time was moored in Portsmouth harbour. Some Cachalots may well know the ship far better than ever I did, because it had for years been used as a cadet training vessel. Foudroyant has incidentally now been renamed with her original name of Trincomalee and is a museum ship in Hartlepool. It's the oldest still floating ex RN ship in U.K. And I like to think that it is floating perhaps partly due to Army help from 17 Port Regiment. The cannon were sold, I understand, to pay for the ships dry docking and a new copper bottom.

We had a 'Mexe' raft alongside, which is a large army crewed raft that some may well remember being effectively used in the Falklands to ferry cargo ashore from anchorages. There was a mobile crane aboard the raft.

We had to lift out about 30 old cannon from right down in the bilges. The only way to do this was to use the traditional old block and tackle methods to hoist the cannon, shoring up tween decks for strength where necessary, and then slide them over the gun deck on greased planks, and through the original gun ports to a waiting hook from the crane aboard the Mexe.

One major problem was the small size of the many hatches that the cannon had to be lifted through. The cannon were far too long for the hatches and therefore had to be sharply angled. Securing the lifting table so that the cannon would not 'fall out' was a major concern. One 'loose cannon' falling from a height may well have gone right through the wooden bottom. No points for that. And maybe a different history for the ship.

Below decks was like going back into history. I will never forget the smell of the old ropes and the tar. The mud we scooped away from the cannon in the bilges revealed many items, like old tallow candles, knives, and even a musket.

This event was probably the last time any serving servicemen worked on the oldest still floating British Naval ship in the World.

David Fisher MBE.

(Ex Army Landing Craft and Warsash Lecturer)



## Seafarers- Last in the queue

**Grey Power, Workboat World, Baird Maritime, April 2020**

We are living in unprecedented times, in a situation where fear and uncertainty oscillate, even in the minds of practical people, with heaps of common-sense. And if it is bad enough on land, try and contemplate the situation afloat aboard the tens of thousands of merchant ships the world depends upon to keep it ticking over. We are not talking about all those cruise ship passengers here, who garner all the publicity whenever merchant shipping rears its rare head in the mainstream media, but the merchant seafarers criss-crossing the globe in every conceivable type of craft and trade. What are they supposed to think as they garner what reliable news they are able to receive about the situation in their home countries?

Almost inevitably this largely unknown workforce constitutes the easy bit of a government regulator's coronavirus agenda. There is no argument and it is the simplest action that can be taken to ban any seafarer from landing in your ports, banning all shore leave and making it impossible for crew members to be exchanged and people to go on leave at the conclusion of their tours of duty. Job done. Decisive action taken. There will be no angry objections, protest meetings or marches. Residents can breathe easily; sure that no foreign seafarers will bring the dreaded virus ashore with them.

But aboard the individual ships, each a little island of uncertainty, there will be nothing positive or supportive to cling onto. Aboard the average bulk carrier, container ship or tanker, there is a tiny society of perhaps 20 people, wondering what is going to happen next; tens of thousands of them, but separate in their small steel cells scattered across the world's sea-lanes and moored in the world's ports. And in so many ships, you can scarcely describe them as constituting a society, possibly coming from different cultures and speaking different languages. Twenty such people – they don't even constitute a village in shore-side terms –let alone a hamlet.

Shipping's official organisations have taken up the cudgels on behalf of their workforce, with both the International Chamber of Shipping and International Transport Workers' Federation lobbying hard to acquaint governments of this essential but invisible constituency and pointing out its

important needs. The Secretary General of the International Maritime Organisation has been increasingly active in demanding that governments heed the human cost at sea and that it is seafarers who will deliver the goods that the world needs to keep ticking over, against its inevitable recovery.

But the worry is that in all the fearsome list of actions required by governments facing this global catastrophe, the needs of those small cells of seafarers aboard the world's merchant ships will tend to come well down in the priorities facing ministers each day the virus rampages across their domestic populations. So nobody is going to make an executive decision to suspend the ban on seafarers landing, even to get an aircraft back to their home countries, and bringing their replacements, when there is the public perception that if the bug is being imported by travellers, it is best to prevent all travel.

And with all this heavy-handed implementation of quarantine regulations, there will often be a complete absence of common sense. A message from a concerned shipmaster, worried about the virus being brought aboard his ship by shore-side workers, shows that this fear of transmission is far from a one-way business. The ship may be perfectly healthy, its crew admittedly angry that they will have to wait fourteen days to even begin to load or discharge cargo, but what of all the folk who come aboard? The customs officers, agents, providores, the port state control officers, surveyors of various kinds, the dockers – does anyone know what virus they might be harbouring, even if they are wearing surgical masks and maintain a respectful distance from one another? Would the master be justified in demanding to know the body temperature of all these boarders, and refusing to allow anyone looking a bit sweaty to come aboard the ship? You can imagine the reaction, but don't those aboard ship have the same human rights of protection against disease as anyone else?

Maersk, with around 350 ships under their control, quite simply told their crews there would be no reliefs for a month, which at least removed doubt and uncertainty, even if it was the last news they wanted to hear. Hopefully, in the intervening weeks, something might be done to provide some sort of clarity in the treatment of international seafarers.



One might imagine that some sort of protocol might be devised by the International Maritime Organisation, those practical people in the ICS and ITF, the World Health Organisation and any other body with appropriate expertise. We surely cannot contemplate a situation that will confine seafarers perpetually on their ships – a million and a half Flying Dutchmen-condemned to circumnavigate the world, bringing us the goods we cannot do without. Seafarers shouldn't be the last in the queue.

**Published with the kind permission of Baird Maritime  
and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

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## 2019 Bursary Southampton Sea Cadets

The Southampton unit used the 2019 bursary to assist five young ladies with ages ranging from 13 to 16 to undertake voyages on board 'TS Royalist'. The younger three Levina, Isabella and Sophia (aged 13 and 14) had the added excitement of a flight to join the ship in Inverness for a week long voyage to Edinburgh. Poppy and Rosie (aged 16 and 15) joined 'TS Royalist' at Oban for a voyage along the Western Isles before returning to Oban. Their reports are below and there seems to be a common thread of friendship, good food and getting wet.

### T.S Royalist 2019 Inverness – Edinburgh

On August 10<sup>th</sup> 2019 we were off to go on Royalist. We took a plane to Inverness and then got a train from the local train station to our destination. We were then greeted by the lovely transport staff. We got on the minibus and in the near distance we saw this gorgeous looking ship awaiting its crew, us. We were welcomed aboard to see some very smiley people. We was told to go register and get our bunk numbers and bracing station cards. We were then given a basic tour of the ship we unpacked our stuff, then quickly walked up on deck to meet the rest of the crew. The evening came round and everyone had finally arrived including people from Northern Ireland. We were introduced to the chef for the week and started with Fish and chips. It was very delicious, but remember "This isn't a hotel" We were





Our new friends

then told to go to bed looking at my bracing card I got main course tack. I didn't really know what this meant but I guess we will learn along the way.



Practising rope work and heaving lines

The next day started early with a lesson in how to correctly put on the harness and then it was a divine English breakfast. The week went really fast and the next few days entailed getting oil skins as it was so wet and many journeys towards our final destination, every time we arrived at a new port we were given a little shore time to go and explore.

We were making the most of the time we had and making friends. On Thursday evening we stopped at Lochness and were able to jump in, it was freezing! Some of us were a little reluctant but ended up taking off the layers and joining the others. We even had a unicorn and flamingo float.

Before long the whistle went and we headed back on the ship to warm up. Lifting anchor we set sail for the final destination Edinburgh.

During the week we had been off to sea and spent time and nights on watch, it was very tiring and cold as we just wanted to sleep but we got through it. As we arrived in the distance we saw the Royal Yacht and much to our surprise we told that we allowed to go onboard. Our digital tour guide showed us around the yacht, it was amazing.



The royal yacht

The final night came round all too quickly and all our goodbyes were said as the taxi was picking us up at 5am. Unfortunately the taxi came early and whisked us off to the airport where we had a subway breakfast and that was the end of our amazing royalist adventure.

By OC Levina , OC Isabella and AC Sophia



## T.S ROYALIST 2019

### Oban to Oban

We arrived on the first day at Oban docks and the sun was out and was relatively warm. We were greeted by the friendly staff and welcomed onboard. We were shown to our bunks and given a brief tour of the ship to

familiarise ourselves. We then stowed away our belongings and quickly got chatting to the other people on the course. It was amazing to meet such a variety of people all from different ends of the UK, even from the Isle of Man. As more and more people began to arrive the space seemed to get cramped but it was a lovely environment to be in surrounded by so many new and interesting faces.



It wasn't long before we were all jump started into action and fitting our harnesses ready to climb the rigging. As you got higher up it gave you more of a perspective for the size and magnificence of the ship we would be staying in for a week. As the week progressed the crew began to feel like a family and every activity was so enjoyable. Our personal favourite was the brass work where you got to polish the ships portholes and bells. We found this really relaxing and it gave us a chance to chat to people and get to know them further.

The weather was really nice for the vast majority of the week and it was lovely to watch and take in the beautiful surroundings, especially the colourful rainbow of houses in Tobermory. However there was one day where the rain was heavy and it as quite windy but we didn't mind because the crew got to wear oilskins which we particularly liked. Everyone had their own bracing station and we loved ours as we could see the whole of the ship and all the sails being edited and changed all the time. Dinner time was the most

exciting and anticipated event of all as everyone had been working so hard all day long and were absolutely starving.

We also enjoyed the third day of our voyage as we were given the chance to jump off the plank of the boat into the sea one by one. We had to jump off the plank and could stay in the water for a maximum of 5 minutes it was so cold! This was a great experience even though the water was very chilly and at points we were surrounded by jellyfish. We found this activity very exciting and it was one of the best experiences throughout the whole week.



Throughout the week we were given night and day watches to make sure that we all had a go at helming. This was a great experience due to the fact we all got a chance to navigate, be in charge and, ultimately earn a new skill.

At the end of the whole week it was very emotional and sad to say goodbye to everyone, we'd had a great week and we hoped to stay in contact with everyone.

Poppy and Rosie



# The Modern Pilot

Captain William J M Hargreaves

(with apologies to John Masefield)

I must go down to the sea again, to the lonely sea and sky,  
And all I ask for is a facemask and gloves to steer her by.  
And the goggles that steam up while the suit is crackling  
and shaking,  
And a grey mist on Solent shore, pandemic breaking.



(If a vessel has known cases of COVID-19 onboard who haven't or can't be isolated then the pilot will wear all the above PPE. It makes casual conversation with the master difficult).

Bill Hargreaves

## Gone Aloft



### **Past Captain I.E.G. DOWNER**

Ivan Edward George Downer went Aloft, peacefully, at Countess Mountbatten Hospice on 13th April, aged 96.

Ivan had been at sea, in command, with Shell Tankers.

He was Captain of the Club in 1988 and was involved with many other associations.

Ivan was pre-deceased by his wife, Margaret and leaves a son, Trevor and daughter Barbara.

A private funeral was due to be held at Wessex Vale Crematorium at 1215 on 30th April.

Donations if desired to RNLI c/o Eastleigh Independent Funeral Directors, Joseph House, 14 Bishopstoke Road, Eastleigh, SO50 6AE. 02380 612444

## The CACHALOTS

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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

Sat 9 May Curry Lunch, Kuti's Royal Pier  
Wed 20 May Club Supper, RBL  
Sat 6 June Curry Lunch, Kuti's Royal Pier  
Thu 4 June Shipping Festival Service, Winchester

## 250 Club

The 250 Club is another casualty of the coronavirus lockdown.

Although we could have used an online random number generator to produce some numbers, the draw has always taken place in public so as to be seen to be above board.

It has been decided to resume the draws when we regain access to the Club room, when draws for each of the missing months, from March onwards, will be held.