

# ***The CACHALOT***

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

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**No 77**

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**June 2020**

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## Captain's Log

Talk to 10 people and you will hear 10 different stories about how the current virus crisis is affecting them. Some are worried about their next pay cheque, some about the risks they run each day travelling to work, some are terminally bored, while others are rushed off their feet. It seems no two people are having the same experience, though the question of the day is the same: how are you managing?

It was therefore refreshing to catch-up this week with George West. George had been trying to contact me for a few days and had asked for a 15-minute phone call. In the end, we spoke for over an hour.

On 14 June 2009, George was a pilot launch coxswain at Peterhead when the small harbour tug *Ijsselstroom* capsized while assisting with the arrival of a large barge. George's pilot launch was the first on scene, and he and his crew were able to rescue all three survivors from the tug as it sank. All good so far, and if you are interested in the story of *Ijsselstroom* you can find the investigation report on the Marine Accident Investigation Branch's (MAIB's) website <https://www.gov.uk/maib-reports/girting-and-capsize-of-tug-ijsselstroom-in-peterhead-bay-scotland>.

While the rescue was a success, George was shocked by how hard it was to recover three people from the water, even to such a low freeboard vessel as a pilot launch, and he has since devoted his life to designing his man overboard recovery system, Quiksling. George was clearly passionate about his invention, a cunning combination of a squarish-looking Perry Buoy and a helicopter lifting strop, and his company appears to be doing well. What struck me, however, was George's passion for saving lives at sea. He has spent 11 years designing and marketing his product, tramping quaysides to demonstrate it to ship's masters, and has travelled widely in Europe where his system is a hit with the fishing fleets. During this time, he has done trials in wave pools and with real vessels, at each stage honing his system. He called to pick my brains about the disasters the MAIB

investigates, but at the end of our conversation I came away with the impression that there was not much that George had not already considered. His system will not work for every vessel, but it comes very close.



So why am I filling the Captain's column with this story? Simply, because there will be an end to this crisis one day, and life will return to something like normal. My conversation with George was inspirational because he was looking beyond the next few weeks to saving seafarers lives in the future. The editor's newsletter is doing the same for the Cachalots. It is keeping us engaged, thinking about each other, and about the future when we are able to pick-up where we left off in February.

Happy reading and, until then, keep safe.

Captain Andrew Moll



## [From the editor](#)

Welcome to *Cachalot 77*, the second all digital edition, another seemingly bumper bundle but not much more in content than I used to squeeze into the 16 page printed edition.

We did manage to send out letters to the ~100 members who were not on the distribution list and this has managed to boost it by 9 to date.

Following comments from some of those who prefer to print out their newsletters for a proper read, I have re-instated page numbers. By printing the newsletter, they lose the digital enhancements such as the embedded links, in light blue, to other pages, publications and websites. Try it on the contents page.



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## Read it on your Kindle too

We can also send a copy of these newsletters, (including ALL the previous ones, on request) 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.

When I was at school in the early 50's this exercise was known as 'composition' so how about we call it

The Cachalots Covid-Coronavirus Composition Competition

Now that might amuse a few and probably irritate a whole lot more, but what we seek is any sort of reaction. After 76 editions the 'Letters to the editor' section has its first contribution, [P 23](#), which also inspired our correspondent to contribute an article as well, so that's a win-win! Other contributions are starting to trickle in, hence the length of this bumper edition, so why not share your memories or words of wit and wisdom with us, and write a piece for this newsletter?

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

## Boatsteerer's Locker

Here we are on our 9th week of self imposed isolation and just about keeping sane.

The highlights of my week are on Tuesday the refuse men come and collect our black plastic sack and the clear one for recycling as per New Forest District Council guidelines, then on Thursday evening at 20-00 hours when we open the door and applaud the NHS staff by clapping and beating pots and pans.

The young boy next door kindly does our weekly shopping at Tesco and once a week I give the car a nonstop run to check everything is OK. Our small cul-de-sac celebrated the 75th Anniversary of VE day by holding a street party but observing the social distancing as recommended by BoJo. We started at 14-30 and finished at 18-00. Everyone had their



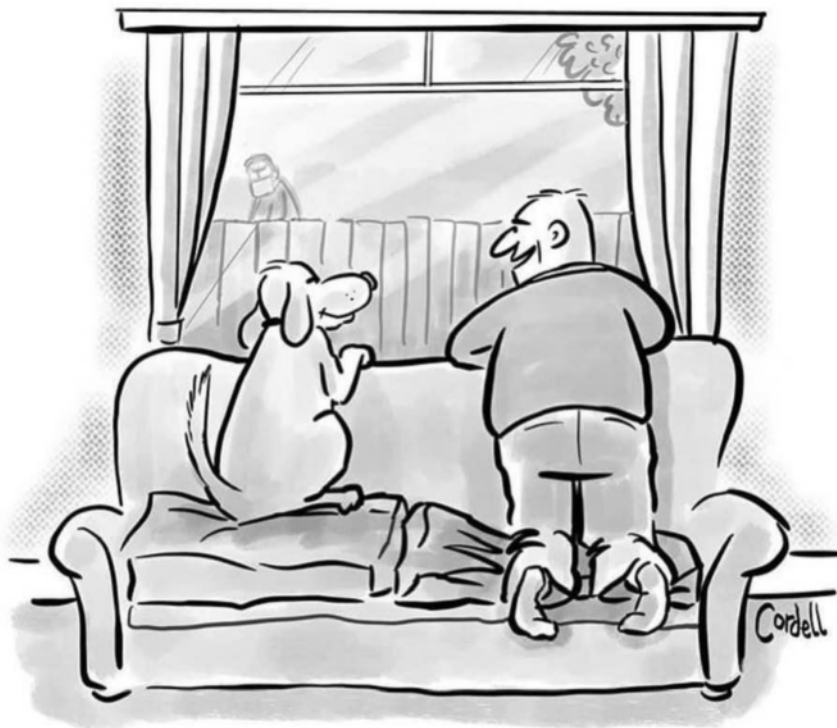
own drinks and one lady supplied cup cakes which were on a table in the centre for everybody to serve themselves. Another lady had her radio and played a CD of Vera Lynn for a singsong with hand held Union Flags being waved. We are now looking forward to the VJ 75th Anniversary in August when I shall wear my pith helmet !

Working in the house and garden I don't seem to be getting near the end of the job list which keeps getting added to and my hair is now quite long so I took the plunge and requested my Boss to try and cut it.

After us both looking at ‘Google- How to cut men’s hair with scissors’ several times she said that she would have a go at cutting it.

Fortunately I found in the garage a pair of nearly new scissors which were starting to go rusty. A good wire brushing, emery paper, oil and elbow grease made a great improvement. It was a Sunday afternoon so sitting on a kitchen chair with a towel around my shoulders my hair was sprayed with water from a container used to spray for green fly on the roses.

Putting on the Television showing the film ‘Paint your Wagon’ the Boss started with a few elastoplasts handy to the tune of ‘They called to wind Maria’. I with closed eyes listened to the snip snip. An hour later to the tune of ‘There’s a Coach Comin’ In’ I opened my eyes gingerly looked in the mirror – not a bad job and no signs of green fly ! So I dismissed the First Response Team which I had arranged to be outside for emergency and poured two large G & Ts, one each. (It will be my turn soon to reciprocate a haircut !!!)



*“Until now, I never understood why you got so excited when someone walked past the house.”*

Finally I’ve borrowed a Quiz for your entertainment

Keep smiling, healthy and sane

Ken Dagnall, Boatsteerer



Steve Pink Hon. Secretary of the World Ship Society Dorset Branch has agreed that I can include this quiz in my blog, as we can no longer have our meetings for the time being.

Steve has devised a quiz so that we don't get too bored.

There is no prize and the answers will be published in the next issue.

**~ Q1 ~ OCEAN LINER ROUTES ... and who made them famous?**

*De-cypher the liner route and tell me which shipping line was best known for the service in the 20th century.*

*Give me the "from" & "to" route plus the line ... 1 point for each correct answer set.*

- (a) **From** Netherlands City at 51°55'N 4°30'E **to** City Port on the Hudson River
- (b) **From** City on the River Mersey **to** Port serving Santiago at 33°03'S 71°37'W
- (c) **From** City at the confluence of the Itchen & Test **to** City north of False Bay

**~ Q2 ~ ALL ABOARD - Guess the total passengers and crew onboard at maximum occupancy**

*Looking for current capacity of the largest cruise ship, largest ferry and the UK's famous paddle steamer. Give me the total persons number for each ship ... 1 point per correct guess (I'll allow 10% either way)*

- (a) Royal Caribbean International's **Symphony of the Seas**
- (b) Color Line's **Color Magic**
- (c) Paddle Steamer Preservation Society's **Waverley**

**~ Q3 ~ P&O PASSENGER SHIP WORDSEARCH - Ships Past, Present & Future**

*How many ship names can you spot? Search right to left, left to right, down or up (no diagonals) ... 1 point per correct name*

T	S	O	R	I	N	A	V	P	B
A	I	N	O	D	A	N	E	A	R
C	M	O	C	R	Z	D	T	I	I
A	E	R	E	I	U	E	U	D	T
N	T	O	A	U	R	O	R	A	T
I	R	N	N	P	A	V	E	C	A
R	A	T	A	N	O	I	A	R	N
O	N	V	O	C	T	U	R	A	I

**~ Q4 ~ A LIFE OF CHANGING NAMES - Match the original name of the ship with its current name**

Vasco de Gama	Pacific Dawn	Southampton Castle	Galaxy	Cowes Castle
Braemar	Viking Valiant	Pride of Cherbourg	Oriama	Isle of Innisfree
Balmoral	R Six	Vitsentzos Kornaros	Viking Viscount	Marella Explorer
Regal Princess	Statendam	Azmamara Journey	Kaitaki	Crown Dynasty

**~ Q5 ~ WHO AM I? - If only ships could speak! Guess the ship from the description given**

*De-cypher the clues and give me each ship's name ... 1 point per correct name ... all local to Dorset/Hants*

(a) Just letting-go and proceeding down river ... in less than 40 minutes I'll be docked in the shadow of the castle on the island ... it's a peak summer weekend so I expect to see "Sun" and "Sky" on the crossing. What's my name?

(b) I've been sailing on this cross-channel route for most of my 28 years ... I've just reported to Harbour Control "Aunt Betty inbound" so I'll be on my berth in less than 15 minutes. What's my name?

(c) I recall WSS Dorset branch members discussing how to tell me from my sistership ... well my top deck is covered in ... I'm 3 years younger ... my Gross Tonnage of 90,900 is 850 more ... and my name has one more letter! What's my name?

Steve Pink

## Cachalot on LinkedIn

The groups aim is to provide a central forum for Cachalot members to stay in touch, especially during the current coronavirus epidemic.

We have now attracted twenty-seven members with four Cachalots who are registered on LinkedIn and who have been invited but have not completed the final action of accepting the invitation.

The group is marked by the Cachalot emblem in place of the usual 'mugshot' and a banner photo which is changed on a weekly basis, normally on a Tuesday. I have a banner photo for next week but will always be grateful for 'new' images of ships you have been on or associated with or marine activities you are involved in.

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 him a Connect request. There should be a box on his page or you might find it under 'More'.
4. Once he accepts your request, he 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 at [robinplumley@outlook.com](mailto:robinplumley@outlook.com)







Mrs. Rachel Dunn,  
3, Elgar Close,  
Alverstoke,  
Gosport,  
Hampshire,  
PO12 2LU.

GAFIRS,  
Lifeboat Lane,  
Stokes Bay,  
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Hampshire,  
PO12 2TR.

Telephone Station: (023) 9258 4017  
Secretary mobile: 07966889351  
Email: [secretary@gafirs.org.uk](mailto:secretary@gafirs.org.uk)  
Website: [www.gafirs.org.uk](http://www.gafirs.org.uk)

2<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

*Dear Rachel,*

**Southampton Master Mariners' Club donation to Gosport and Fareham inshore Rescue Service (GAFIRS)**

I write on behalf of GAFIRS to thank you and the members of the Southampton Master Mariners' Club for your generous donation of £541.45, raised for us as your chosen charity as Club Captain, 2019 to 2020; your kindness in thinking of us is greatly appreciated.

I know you are well aware of GAFIRS, but for your members who are less familiar with us the following information may be of interest:

GAFIRS is a busy independent lifeboat service founded in 1969 and based at Stokes Bay, Gosport. We operate two lifeboats and our unpaid volunteer members provide an emergency search and rescue capability for HM Coastguard covering Portsmouth Harbour and the eastern Solent. On average we respond to over 100 incidents a year ranging from simple breakdowns to life-at-risk emergencies and so far this year we have responded to twelve incidents.

In addition to our search and rescue work we also provide free sea-safety education talks to local schools, youth and adult community groups and, through our cadet membership scheme, train young people in lifesaving skills.

During the current national emergency, we have made our Land Rover and a team of volunteer drivers available to Gosport Borough Council and have made 236 deliveries of food and medicine for them to local vulnerable people.

All our work is made possible by the generous support of people such as you.

Thank you again for your kind donation which is gratefully received and I look forward to welcoming you to our station as soon as circumstances permit.

Yours sincerely,

*Keith N Thomas.*

Keith N. Thomas.  
Secretary, GAFIRS.

GAFIRS is an independent lifeboat service and a registered charity number 1159681.

# Pictures from a pandemic

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

When times are bad, you need your friends about to help you. But at the present, the shipping industry seems to be running very short of friendly supporters, when other struggling industrial sectors in many countries are having money chucked at them by governments. We are urged to show our support for our brave health and other essential workers by clapping, and banging pots and pans in a somewhat North Korean programmed surge of emotion. But nobody (with the exception of a few lone industry leaders) says that seafarers and indeed the whole shipping industry are every bit as essential and, in terms of doing their jobs in difficult times, heroic. Their statements, however firm, don't seem to resonate with either public or governments.

There was an extraordinary picture of Manila Bay, not a place on normal cruise itineraries, which showed no fewer than seven gigantic cruise ships, anchored in the roadstead. They were, of course, landing their huge numbers of hotel staff, which unfriendly governments elsewhere were refusing to permit, lest they contaminate the local population on the way to their airports. In some countries, which in normal times would see port managements desperate to persuade cruise ships to call, there has been extraordinary hostility, the inference that their "customers" were plague ships which should be driven away from their shores forthwith.

There have been some very nasty incidents, like calls for emergency medical assistance from ships being peremptorily refused, even when there was not the slightest suggestion that there was any contagion aboard. In one case it was a suspected stroke, an emergency that requires instant evacuation and not negotiations taking days, by which the patient will have been damaged beyond repair, or dead.

It maybe doesn't help that shipping today is so remorselessly "international", with no apparent links to virtually any nation, in a pandemic in which national and even local opinion matters. Take, for instance, the statement from P&O Ferries which operates around the UK and Europe which asked for UK government assistance to keep their operation afloat, without their travelling passengers. It was a cue for

hollow laughter, people recalling that the company is beneficially owned in Dubai, and that the company had recently removed their ships from the UK flag, to the considerable distress of the struggling ship registry. It might be a big employer of locals, and logistically an essential service, but that didn't really register.

Where is your flag, when the chips are down and you need the assistance of governments, and in an international organisation, which government ought you to approach? It was a dilemma perfectly encapsulated in the cruise sector, with three quarters of fleet and most of the biggest operators registering their ships for financial convenience and manning them from around the world. One was reminded of the Iran-Iraq war and the attacks of heroic aviators on tankers in the gulf, with owners rapidly re-registering their ships under flags which might offer them some naval protection in organised convoys. When the chips were down, the convenient registers weren't that convenient. You don't need a heart of stone to recall cynical thoughts, noting that once the missiles and bombs had stopped flying around, they quickly went back to their convenient havens.

Your accountants might greatly approve of your efforts to discover the cheapest possible register for your ships, and be delighted when you man them from the best bargains in the international manpower bazaar, but you needn't think that there will be any support from governments, on the rare occasions when you need them. The consul of some microstate isn't going to leap to your defence when there are problems that can only be resolved by a responsible flag state (the Marshall Islands being a rare exception). And what is being thrown up by a pandemic does not lend themselves to solutions other than those in which governments – sensible flag states – need to be involved. Perhaps, when the dust settles after this dreadful time, the survivors might ponder on these things and ask themselves who their friends really are?

**Published with the kind permission of the editor of Seatrade-Maritime [www.seatrade-maritime.com](http://www.seatrade-maritime.com) and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey.**

*[rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk](mailto:rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk)*



## Confusing times

It will be many years since most of the readers of this nautical melange stood on the deck waiting to greet the pilot. You may be surprised that the figure that emerges from the Southampton pilot launch might look like this, were you to be in this position in May 2020.



You will have seen the pictures of Bill Hargreaves and myself wearing PPE in the last Cachalot. This extreme dressing up is done on ships where the Medical Health Form (a recent requirement for all ships during the Pandemic) states that COVID 19 is present on board.

I say ‘might’ because there are 38.5\* of us, all Master Mariners, therefore all putting our own slant onto guidance and instructions, thus 38.5 different ways of doing EVERYTHING!

The black trousers are self-explanatory, as are the safety shoes.

The big orange coat provides warmth, rain proofing, hi-vis safety on the dockside, hi-vis safety if we fall overboard, a lifejacket, lights, personal responder beacon, whistle and a myriad of pockets for gloves, hat, vhf radio, passage plan, mars bars etc.

The blue gloves provide reassurance to the ship’s crew that the pilot is taking personal anti-bac measures (even if they are pointless).

The helmet is now worn by nearly all of us when transferring between launch and ship, as man-overboard exercises (practical exercises, jumping off and being recovered to a launch) have taught us that during recovery

there is a very high likelihood of head damage. It is, of course, also recommended for all areas that we walk through, even though a pilot wouldn't be required yet if overhead work is still in progress!

The mask is for COVID protection to protect either the pilot or crew (as per my article in Cachalot 76) from any COVID contamination, whilst the glasses are (a) because many of us have reached a certain age, (b) anti COVID, (c) because some H&S wallah who has never climbed a pilot ladder has suggested their use or (d) to look even more cool. Or possibly a combination of these.

The pilot's job has an added stress dimension (or is it just another source of amusement?) at the moment, as we have no idea how the crew are reacting to the pandemic until we board. Even if we find ourselves returning to the same ship, they might have had a different company directive, change of crew, or change of way of thinking (maybe having read the Daily Mail). When sailing the Queen Mary 2 the other day the most important thing seemed to be to disinfect my shoes and make sure that I was wearing a mask. Nobody else was. Or, on a small coaster, they might make a big deal about leaving one side of the bridge for the pilot and everyone wearing masks, before then leaning over to provide a mug of coffee. The duty officer on many ships now asks us to complete another pointless form, often after we have been on board for some time, asking us whether we have COVID, have been in contact with anyone who has, or have flu like symptoms.

Other ships will take our temperature. On 3 ships so far, my temperature has been less than 34. Apparently, the fact that I am either suffering from hypothermia or that the thermometer isn't working, doesn't matter – their only concern is if I am indicating a fever.

I was amused to see that 2 inward ships that I piloted, which had declared COVID on board, were still flying the Q flag – probably having no idea why they had been hoisting it in every port for ever?

*\* Why 38.5 pilots? At the moment there are 39 full time pilots and 3 pilots who are working 50% - a sort of job share. Out of this, 2 of our number have been temporarily seconded as Harbour Master and his Deputy.*

Noel Becket

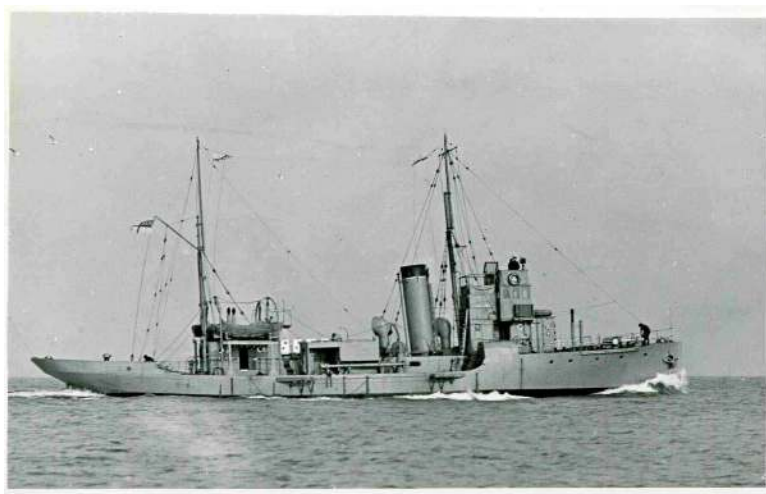
## What's in a Name?

### ***Cachalot***

I was thinking about the Cachalot nameplate above the bar today and started an internet search for a railway locomotive which may have been named as such. My search provided no clue although the name-plate looks remarkably like one which would have been attached to a diesel or electric locomotive. One of our club 'fonts of knowledge', confirmed to me that the plate did indeed come from the Porpoise Class submarine ***HMS Cachalot***. I knew that!

So, I changed tack to the Royal Navy. I found three references to vessels named Cachalot. These included:

#### ***HMS Cachalot (Z7)***



Z7 was a Z-class anti-submarine whaler built in 1915 by Smith's Dock Company at Middlesbrough and sold in 1933 (then salvage vessel *Gladiator*).

#### ***HMS Cachalot (N-83)***



N-83 was one of the six-ship class of Grampus mine-laying submarines of the Royal Navy. She was built at Scotts of Greenock, being launched on 2<sup>nd</sup>



December 1937 and commissioned on 15th August 1938.

In August 1940, *HMS Cachalot* torpedoed and sank the German submarine *U-51* in the Bay of Biscay and in September the German auxiliary minesweeper *M 1604 Österreich* hit a mine laid by *HMS Cachalot* and sank.

She was assigned to operate in the Mediterranean in 1941.

*HMS Cachalot* left Malta on 26th July, bound for Alexandria. At 2 o'clock on the morning of 30th July, off Benghazi, the Italian destroyer *Achille Papa* was spotted causing her to dive. Upon resurfacing she was attacked by the Italian vessel. *HMS Cachalot* attempted to dive again but the upper hatch jammed, and the Italian destroyer rammed her. The crew scuttled the ship as they abandoned her and all personnel except for a Maltese steward were picked up by the Italians.

*HMS Cachalot* (S06)



S-06 was one of eight Porpoise Class diesel-electric submarines operated by the Royal Navy. This class was originally designated patrol submarines, then attack. They were the first conventional British submarines to be built after the end of World War II. Their design was, in many ways, influenced by the German World War II-era Type XXI U-boats.

Her keel was laid down on 1st August 1955 by Scotts Shipbuilding and Engineering Company at Greenock. She was launched on 11th December 1957 and commissioned on 1st September 1959.

The image below shows Staff Captain J. Wilson Smith representing the Club at the re-commissioning of *HMS Cachalot* on May 3rd, 1973 at Devonport. He presented the C.O., Lieut-Commander A.W. Wainwright





with a silver whale as a personal gift from the Master Mariners' Club, together with a number of 'whale' paperweights.

*HMS Cachalot* attended the 1977 Silver Jubilee Fleet Review off Spithead when she was part of the Submarine Flotilla.

She was sold on the 12th November 1979 for breaking up at Blyth.

The search also revealed an American submarine with the same name.

***USS Cachalot (SS-170)***



SS-170 was built by the Portsmouth Navy Yard, Kittery, Maine, as were most of the previous V-boats. She differed from her sister *USS Cuttlefish* mainly in retaining the riveted (vice welded) construction of most previous submarines. Both were medium-sized submarines built under the tonnage limits of the London Naval Treaty of 1930. An extensive study was conducted to determine the optimum submarine size under the treaty restrictions, factoring in total force, endurance, and percentage of the force that could be maintained on station far from a base, as in a Pacific war scenario. Despite the calculation process, size reduction had gone too far with the two Cachalots Class boats, limiting their patrol endurance. After three Pacific war patrols, *USS Cachalot* was relegated to training duties in September 1942, once numerous Gato-class boats became available.

Built in 1933, after shakedown, further construction, tests, and overhaul, *USS Cachalot* sailed for San Diego, California, where on 17th October 1934 she joined the Submarine Force, U.S. Fleet. Operating until 1937 principally on the West Coast, she engaged in fleet problems, torpedo practice, and antisubmarine, tactical, and sonar training exercises. She cruised twice to Hawaiian waters and once to the Panama Canal Zone to participate in large-scale fleet exercises.

*USS Cachalot* cleared San Diego on 16th June 1937, bound for New London, Connecticut, and duty in experimental torpedo firing for the Newport Torpedo Station and sonar training for the New London Submarine School until 26th October 1937, when she began a lengthy overhaul at the New York Navy Yard. This included replacement of her troublesome engines with General Motors Winton engines. A year later, she sailed for participation in a fleet problem, torpedo practice and sound training in the Caribbean Sea and off the Canal Zone, and on 16th June 1939 reported at Pearl Harbour for duty with the Submarine Force and the Scouting Force.

War came to *USS Cachalot* as she lay in Pearl Harbour Navy Yard in overhaul. In the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour of the 7th December 1941, one of her men was wounded, but the submarine suffered no damage. Yard work on her was completed at a furious pace, and on 12th January 1942 she sailed on her first war patrol. After fuelling at Midway Island, she conducted a reconnaissance of Wake Island, Eniwetok, Ponape, Truk, Namonuito, and the Hall Islands, returning to Pearl Harbour on 18th March with vitally needed intelligence of Japanese bases. Her second war patrol, for which she cleared from Midway on 9th June, was conducted off the Japanese home islands, where she damaged an enemy tanker. Returning to Pearl Harbour on 26th July, she cleared on her final war patrol on 23rd September, penetrating the frigid waters of the Bering Sea in support of the Aleutian Islands operations.

Over-age and lacking endurance for strenuous war patrols, *USS Cachalot* still had a key role to play, acting as training ship for the Submarine School at New London. She served there from late 1942 until 30th June 1945, when she sailed to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, being decommissioned there on 17th October. She was sold for scrap on 26th January 1947.

References: Wikipedia, [www.uboat.net](http://www.uboat.net), RN Submarine Museum, Gosport.

Robin Plumley

## A time of strange voyages

In all the economic and transport turmoil caused by the coronavirus and violent movements in the oil price, there are some very strange voyages taking place. There are giant cruise ships, emptied of their guests, sailing half way around the world to get their hotel crews home. There are container ships, with a barely paying payload, being directed to sail around the Cape between the Far East and North Europe, to save the canal dues that might make a difference between loss and profit on the voyage. Fuel prices are low and slow steaming is encouraged. And there are fully laden VLCCs wandering almost aimlessly around the oceans at very slow revolutions, as their owners search the world's ports for an empty tank, into which they can pump their cargo.

For those brought up on the discipline of “fast passages” and always taking the most direct route, it goes against the grain to be behaving in such a way, taking “the long way home” and forgetting those important words “utmost despatch”, which used to appear in all sailing directions. But these are uncertain times, and even if they will not be remembered fondly, they will be difficult to forget.

Ocean passages contain many surprises. Years ago, as navigator of a ship in the Queensland port of Brisbane, the master, a chap with an inquiring mind, asked me to compare the various ways in which we could return home to our home port of London. It took a bit of time, in the days before navigational computers, but I plotted a route across the Pacific via Panama, both north about and south about Australia through Torres and Bass Straits respectively, thence with the option of routes through the Suez Canal and around the Cape of Good Hope. For fun I threw in a passage through the Southern Ocean around Cape Horn. If I was doing the same today, I might have added a Polar route north of Russia.

The surprise was that in all of these different options, there were only a couple of days difference between the longest and shortest route, before you took into account the sort of weather that you might have encountered. It surprised both of us and although I rather liked the idea of a trip through the Torres Strait, or even being able to boast of having rounded Cape Horn, we opted for our normal homewards route through the Bass Strait and Suez.

Since then voyages plans have had to be abruptly changed on a number of occasions. The closure of the Suez Canal was one of these strange interruptions in the 1970s. While in the 1980s, container ships bound for Europe from New Zealand would routinely head down into the storms of the Southern Ocean and the Horn, to save the costs of a Panama Canal transit at a time when fuel costs were sky-high and freight rates rock bottom. I remember meeting an old shipmate after one of these voyages and noting that he didn't have his usual bronzed countenance after a blue-water voyage across the sunny Pacific, and hearing his tale of woe about rolling like a pig in the icy southern latitudes. We have had several periods when slow steaming has made short voyages interminably long, whether it was to save money, or the planet.

If you look at this positively, if nothing else, it does demonstrate the flexibility of shipping compared to other modes of transport, as it does offer its users choices not available elsewhere. We might reflect on this, when global trade and transport have settled down and shipping can once again operate optimally.

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## New Member

**William Hargreaves** is a senior Southampton Pilot who went to sea in 1975 and worked for Bibby Bros all through his seagoing career, although that included secondments to Silver Line, The Shipping Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago, and Libya's General National Maritime Transport Company. His seagoing career was primarily on tankers, (both product and crude), and LPG vessels. He sailed for three years as master, coming ashore at the end of 1989.

Bill spent the next 19 months working as a Nautical Surveyor and Examiner for the Department of Transport Marine Directorate, before joining ABP in 1992 and qualifying as a pilot in September. He became a First Class Unrestricted pilot in 1995 and after a brief interval was selected initially as a Choice or Specialist pilot for a container ship company, but since 1996 he has been a Specialist pilot for Esso.

In 2004 he became an Associate Lecturer at Warsash, primarily preparing students of all levels for their MCA Orals. Since 2018 his main focus has shifted to teaching at the Manned Model Shiphandling Centre at Timsbury.

When not working he enjoys hiking, camping, canoeing/kayaking and cycling. Eighteen months ago he managed to fulfil a long-held ambition of cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats, supported by wife, campervan, and dog.

## My last trip

*Cachalot Roy Martin reflects upon his last days as a seafaring officer*

I have been lucky enough to be home for the birth of both of our children. Our son was due in February 1963, that particularly cold winter. In the southern Baltic we encountered a thick layer of ice that was more the consistency of sorbet, but the *Baltic Exporter* was well-powered and we kept moving. The others we passed were mostly stuck, with little prospect of ice breaker assistance.

On the way home we were told that we were to be diverted to Ipswich, so, in the cold half-light of a late January morn, we embarked a pilot at the Sunk. He said that nothing had moved in the Orwell for over a week, so he would put us to anchor off Harwich. The old man nodded in my direction saying 'his wife is expecting a baby, so we are going up'. With that he rang full ahead and off we went. The ice was no thicker than glass, but the headline in the local paper said 'British ship ice frees Ipswich.

I had no such problems getting home for the next birth, in October 1966. By this time I was working for Sugar Line and was told that my next ship would be their *Sugar Importer*. A week before I was due to join, the office called to speak to my wife. Would she like to do the trip with us, a quick round trip to the Caribbean? Understandably she declined.

When I joined I found that we had two passengers, a recently retired sugar broker and his wife. Apparently the wife had said that she didn't want to be the only woman on the ship, so the Second Mate's wife had agreed to join us.

The Dock Street crowd were a militant mob, it became obvious that some of them had be leaders of the seamen's strike, earlier in the year. As we crossed the Atlantic we received a message that we were to go to Beaumont, Texas, which was of course not a sugar port. When we arrived it became obvious that we were to load bulk sulphur, for New Zealand.

When we started loading the Master called me up to his cabin and said that he wasn't well; he followed this by saying 'you'll have to take her from here'. At about the same time the Second Mate's wife announced that she was pregnant, and had been when she joined the ship. I had decided some years before that I was not cut out for command, and I certainly had no

intention of changing my mind on that occasion. Someone persuaded the old man to carry on.

The crew wanted a crossing the line ceremony. We all joined in, until they wanted to dunk the pregnant wife, which I had to stop. We arrived in Port Taranaki to discharge. Among the messages from the office was that Princess Margaret was to formally open the new Thames sugar terminal on our arrival, so at least the starboard side was to be smart. I told the bo'sun to put the paint stages over, only to be told that the deck crew would not man them, without safety harnesses. I got the two harnesses out of the smoke helmet boxes and rigged those for them to use, now we were down to one stage. A little while later I went to see how the painters were doing, only to see the harnesses hanging there, unused. I told them to put them on, but they refused.

We were then sent to MacKay, Queensland to load sugar, homeward bound at last! On the way up one on the units on the opposed piston Doxford failed and we legged it on the remaining four. When we berthed it was agreed that we could remain alongside to repair the unit. During the loading there was a typhoon warning, and, as soon as we had finished, we were kicked out, in case we damaged the sugar loader by ranging up and down. There was no concern for us, within the Barrier Reef, with a dodgy engine in a storm.

As it was the typhoon went in a different direction, but, as we approached the Torres Strait, we were told that the white metal face of the thrust block was scored. We went to anchor off Thursday Island. Fortunately the Second Engineer had served his time with Doxford and believed that he could machine the face using the main engine as a lathe; but before that the damaged unit needed to be repaired. To do this the whole unit needed to be jacked up, but first we needed to find a way of spreading the load on the bottom of the crank case. The two of us made a template, which was sent ashore and a baulk of iron wood was sent out, rough cut as we had asked. Fortunately I had spent a couple of weeks of my first trip using an adze, so I was able to spend the next few days shaping the timber. Once it was in place, and covered with steel plate, my job was done.

The Second, with the more Junior Engineers, repaired the piston and then began the painstaking business of machining the face. That was an epic, calculating the number of revolutions he needed for each setting of the

cutting tool. Not being an engineer there is no point in me pretending to understand the detail.

We then began to run out of drinking water. I had the boat deck scrubbed and we piped the plentiful rainwater down to the tanks; but the crew refused to drink this, preferring the water from the evaporator! One evening, making my way aft with only a pair of flip-flops on my feet, I was horrified to find the deck part covered with sea-snakes. The crew had been fishing for them, then leaving them half alive on the deck to 'make into belts'. That had to stop, and I made them clear the deck.

After about three weeks of engine repairs a couple of the Engineer Superintendents arrived. They wanted the thrust covered and insisted that we set off. The Second had warned them that the job was not complete and we had to anchor again to finish properly.

We then went onto Singapore for bunkers and water. By this time the pregnant lady had quite a bump. She had decided that, as I had been present at my daughters birth, I was the one to deliver her child. I tried to recruit the sugar broker's wife as my assistant, but she had no intention of getting involved. I read the two pages on childbirth in the Ship master's Medical Guide a number of times, but felt that I was not up to the task. I suggested that she should be landed, but no one was willing to arrange that.

As it was we made it home, without further alarm. I have no idea if the terminal was officially opened. I told Sugar Line that I didn't want stay at sea, but they insisted that I did one more trip. After all they had paid me a bonus, of fifty pounds, and they felt I should be loyal. That trip was only six weeks.

There is a photograph of me, taken when we were somewhere in the Indian Ocean, all eight stone of me, seemingly held up by a pair of epaulettes, but sadly I can't find it.





## Letters to the editor

*Finally, after 76 editions, I have received one, (one that I can print anyway). Past Captain (and bar) Les Morris has the honour of being the first correspondent.*

Dear Editor

Heartiest congratulations on the first digital edition of "The Cachalot! It presents well on my laptop and prints clearly on my elderly laser (monochrome) printer. Of course, it takes a few more pages than before; but is well worth it. I can of course revert to the laptop for the colour photographs, or (dare I say it?) sneak a print on my wife's colour printer, assuming I have sufficient brownie points in store....

The contents are always interesting, but this time the usual high quality has excelled. New times perhaps? Covid-19 of necessity has to hog the headlines, but at least Noel Becket enlightens us on procedures that are now followed when a Pilot boards a ship. He also shows us his fashionable new uniform!

I hesitate to select other items from this edition - they are all good - but I have to draw attention to Barry Peck's piece, "Southampton's SF Panther". It is so gratifying that "Panther" was finally found a slot that suited her well (in fact the sort of service she was built for) as the "Terje Vigen".

I was one of her officers from her first voyage and for the following six months. She was not the best choice of ship for a service from Southampton to Northern Spain, despite being well built and powered. She could not sustain her schedule, but that was because her schedule was too much for her in the first place, even in calm weather. It didn't help that incorrect propellers were fitted at the outset. Also she was not stabilised and could not take a full size container on its road transporter etc.

Despite all this, there was something about "Panther" that endeared herself to most of the officers and crew. (The constant rolling, perhaps?). So it was very gratifying to read an article that was so positive about Southampton's "SF Panther".

Thank you Barry!

Sincerely yours

Leslie R Morris

Past Captain, "The Cachalots": formerly 2nd Officer and Chief Officer, "SF Panther"

## SF Panther, again

Barry Peck's article "Southampton's SF Panther" inevitably caught my eye in "The Cachalot No 76" – the first Digital version. I say "inevitable", because in December 1973 I had passed my examination for Master (Foreign Going) and obtained a pink (?) slip of paper stating I had done so. This enabled me to join Southern Ferries as 2nd Officer soon afterwards, whereupon I was appointed to their newly acquired ship, the "SF Panther". She was being prepared in Southampton for her new service: twice weekly from Southampton to Pasajes, the port for San Sebastian, Northern Spain. I "signed on" on 14 December 1973 and took over the navigator's duties. In addition to the Master, the other deck officers were a Chief Officer and two 2nd Officers, all with Master's Certificates, or in my case, "a pink slip".

We sailed from Southampton on the inaugural voyage on 26 December (I think) 1973 and returned on 29th December 1973. I then signed off and went on leave for a week.

The weather for that first voyage was fair and (again I think) we went around Ushant before heading directly towards Pasajes. It soon became clear that we could not maintain the speed required for the schedule. In fact two things very quickly became apparent:

1. If we took a traditional route down channel, around the west of Ushant, then set course straight to Pasajes, we would need to undertake this passage at the full cruising speed of the ship (I believe this was 23 knots). No allowance had been made for reduction of speed in pilotage waters or for weather. In other words we could not keep to the set schedule even in flat calm weather.

2. The ship could not make the required 23 knots. In fact we struggled to make 20 knots in fair weather. I checked the slip figures with the engine room on several occasions, but the medium speed engines were running well and at their normal full sea-speed RPM. I was getting slips (engine theoretical speed compared to actual speed) of between 20% and 25%. They should have been about 8%. I should add that the propellers were fixed pitch, so engine RPM directly controlled ship's speed.

When I came back off leave, the Master, Captain Gordon Renshawe (Past Captain of The Cachalots, 1987, now gone aloft) took me to one side and told me the problem. Ice propellers had routinely been fitted by the previous owners and these had a lower pitch than the main propellers. Southern Ferries had not been told of this fact, apparently.

Captain Renshawe was an ex- "General Steam Navigation" Master and was well used to navigating in tight coastal areas and undertaking his own pilotage. He was also familiar with the channels between Ushant and the mainland, namely "Chenal du Four" (close to Brittany) and "Passage de Fromveau" (close to the east coast of Ushant.) He instructed all Deck Officers attached to "SF Panther" to familiarise themselves in detail with the navigation of these channels and of the Chaussee de Seine nearby. In due course Captain Renshawe examined all of us and signed our certificates with the Fleet Manager. Mine was dated 5 February 1974.

As time passed, it became obvious that a ship of "SF Panther's" size (4467.98 GRT) and type (drive-through RO-RO), would struggle on a Biscay run. Being drive-through, she had ramps at the bow and stern. When the ship was taken over, Southern Ferries fitted an extra watertight door inside the bow ramp. Obviously heavier seas were expected on the Biscay Run?

Weather was the other problem. Or rather, the ship's reaction to it. In common with similar ships, "Panther" (as we called her) was a very "stiff" ship in stability terms. This results in a high acceleration roll. She was also very fine lined, being in naval architect terms, a "fast hull". The combination made her "very lively" indeed. Any course from the Brest /Ushant area to Pasajes is about SSE and that puts the ship about beam-on to the mainly prevailing W'ly to SWly swells. With no stabilizers, heavy rolling was inevitable under such circumstances. It was in the crew's interest (they had to fix any problems at sea) to make sure that everything on the vehicle decks were fully secured with chains (trucks) and webbing traps and wedges (cars, and smaller trucks). Even so, damage occurred in rough weather and it did not take long before both UK and Spanish press took an interest and even met the ship on occasion after a bad weather passage.

“Not enough room in the engine room for the fins to retract” was the stock answer to the question to why stabilizers had not been fitted before, but that answer did not fit for non-retractable fins, the length of which were governed by the block co-efficiency of the hull.

In the summer of 1974 I was given a shore posting as Terminal Officer in Southampton, basically to liaise between the Cross-Channel ships “Dragon” and “Leopard” of sister company Normandy Ferries, the “Panther”, and the shore-side office. Sometime during this period I was approached by the Fleet Manager, (Alec Stevens?) who asked me to write him a note about Sperry non-retractable fin stabilizers, which I duly did <sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, Alec Stevens had a very severe car crash shortly afterwards and was very badly injured. Sadly, I never saw him again.

I resigned from Southern Ferries at the end of 1974 and joined the Post Office cable ships, who were moving to Southampton, in January 1975. That was not the end of my time on the Southampton ferries though. During the summer I had been offered a post as a Lecturer at the College of Nautical Studies, Warsash. This, I had accepted with the blessing of the Cable Ships’ managers, on the understanding that I would help out in the summer holidays when I could. Meanwhile Ann and I booked a trip across to France on the “Dragon” in July. On the day, and while waiting to depart, we were spotted by the captain of the ship (John Morton – an old friend), who insisted we joined him on the bridge and afterwards in his cabin. By the time we reached Le Havre he had extracted a promise that I would do a couple of cross-channel trips to enable one of his officers to have some leave in August.

Accordingly, I signed on the “Dragon” on 12th August 1975 and signed off on 15th August to join the “SF Panther” (Captain Renshawe again!). If memory serves well, I believe it was one trip to Spain followed by a cross-channel to Le Havre. I remember that well. On departure, Captain Renshawe brought her off the linkspan, stopped the ship, looked at me: “take her out?”. Yes! I stayed on the bridge until midnight; was at arrival stations at Southampton in the morning; then signed off. It was 22

August 1975. The last time I was aboard the “SF Panther”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I had undertaken a ship design thesis at the University of Southampton 1969-72 and had selected non-retractable fin stabilizers for my ship as there was insufficient room in the engine room for the fins to retract..

Leslie R Morris

Past Captain

PS. In the next two years, I did go to the cable ships in August, so I did keep my promise!

PPS. I still do not know what stabilizers were fitted to the “Panther”, although I suspect I’m about to find out!

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<sup>2</sup> In the mid-90’s I was a Consultant and had a business meeting in the Thistle Hotel at Aberdeen Airport. I had some time on my hands and got talking to the hotel bus driver, who also had time on his hands. It turned out he had been a Purser on a ferry. It was called the “*St Clair*” and had been on the Aberdeen – Lerwick route. He also told me that one of the ship’s stabilizer fins had been knocked off sometime, but they thought it might have been something like a semi-submerged container, or even a whale. Furthermore, the remaining fin worked perfectly well until the next dry-docking. “*St Clair*” was previously the “*SF Panther*”!



## Rocking through the ages

These three pictures span 7 generations and one family rocking chair.

Past Captain Ian Thomson and his wife Joanne are shown centre, copying the pose, around 120 years ago, of Ian’s great grandfather, Captain Robert Thomson, with his wife Helen. On the right, is Ian and Joannes’ great grandson Oswald, 9 months old.

So, Robert is Oswald’s great, great, great, great grandfather. Isn’t that great!



A history of Ian’s forebears and their life at sea, in sail and steam, including letters home, can be found on our website under Club Journal: “The Cachalot”.

Scroll way down to “From sail to steam, Ian Thomson’s forebears”

Or, click [Here](#)



## The Beira Patrol.

The progressive decolonisation of Africa in the early 1960's activated the alarm bells amongst a majority of the white population of Rhodesia who saw it as the first steps towards black majority rule. In an effort to delay what many saw as inevitable Rhodesia's predominantly white government issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from the United Kingdom on 11th November 1965. At that time the UK government -with Harold Wilson as Prime Minister - supported Rhodesia's transition to a multiracial democracy and Ian Smith, the Primer Minister of Rhodesia knew that this would result in racial equality and black majority rule - hence his declaration of UDI.

The United Nations Security Council took action by passing Resolution 27, calling for sanctions against Rhodesia including military action but the UK was opposed to many of these and imposed its own national sanctions which included an oil embargo.

The embargo made little impact on Rhodesia's economy due to sanctions evasion enabled by Mozambique and South Africa and although Harold Wilson predicted that sanctions would lead to the fall of the illegal Rhodesian Government this did not happen. It was obvious that greater sanctions were necessary and the Royal Navy began looking into the formation of a maritime blockade against ships carrying oil destined for Rhodesia.

The problem WAS that oil for Rhodesia was being carried into Beira (a Portuguese port in Mozambique and the terminus of a pipeline going to Rhodesia) and in an endeavour to put a halt to this the Royal Navy established The Beira Patrol.

In late February 1966, the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle departed Singapore and took up station in international waters off Beira until early May when she was relieved by the carrier HMS Ark Royal and returned to Singapore. The Beira Patrol lasted some nine years - until 1975 - but it achieved little and tankers flying the ensigns of Portugal and South Africa ensured that the Beira pipeline was kept well supplied with oil for Rhodesia. The naval ships could only question Beira bound tankers but only divert them with the agreement of their flag state (which was rarely forthcoming).

The UN Security Council subsequently passed Resolution 21 but as this only applied the vessels bound for Beira it was largely negated when these ships used

other ports in Mozambique and the oil was carried to Rhodesia by road or rail. Many South African flag tankers joined this lucrative trade.

Soon, Ark Royal was joined by frigates, destroyers and a logistic ship but the patrol achieved scant success and Rhodesia enjoyed an adequate supply of oil and other essentials.

Despite many attempts, the UK never managed to get UN authority for other navies to participate in this unsuccessful operation and as the years passed the Patrol was slowly run down. In March 1971, the new Prime Minister, Edward Heath reduced it to a one vessel operation and, on June 25th 1975 it was discontinued.

Subsequently, it was revealed that some 76 RN vessels and aircraft participated in this worthless undertaking at a cost of 100 million pounds and during its "lifetime" a total of 47 laden oil tankers were intercepted, of which, 42 delivered their cargo to Rhodesia !

CRK 16.4.20



### An unexpected guest.

The Union-Castle mailship "Edinburgh Castle" arrived in Capetown on her outward passage on August 6th.1974 and, almost immediately commenced the discharge of the mail and cargo, followed later by the disembarkation of the majority of her 626 passengers. In the afternoon, a few coastwise passengers embarked but the majority embarked on August 7th.and the vessel departed Capetown for Port Elizabeth, East London, Durban - and return to Capetown - on the afternoon of that day.

Shortly before departure, the Capetown Manager for Union-Castle paid me his usual visit for a chat (and a glass of light refreshment) and in the course of the conversation he remarked " I see that you have a Mr. and Mrs. Ellis travelling First Class to Durban - I am sure that you will recognise them". I expressed some surprise at this and, after a wry smile he said " I am sure you will recognise Mr. Ian Smith, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia and his wife - they are travelling under assumed names -Mr.and Mrs. Ellis ...to avoid any upset". I remarked that I was sure that any upset was unlikely - and he drank up, and left. We departed Cape Town and after the usual "Passenger Safety



Muster" I decided to call upon "Mr. and Mrs. Ellis" informally. So, without my uniform cap, I went to their First Class Cabin and knocked on the door.

It was opened almost immediately by an attractive woman who looked somewhat surprised to see me. I said "Good afternoon, Mrs. Smith ..I have just dropped by to welcome you aboard Edinburgh Castle and to see if there is anything you need" -and with that Mr. Ian Smith appeared, we shook hands, he invited me into the cabin and we made more formal introductions.

On the coastal passage there was no "Captain's Table" as such but I invited Mr. Smith and his wife (Janet) to join me for dinner -with "drinks" beforehand in my cabin -and our "friendship" blossomed. He was doing a lot of writing so we reserved a desk for him in the "Writing Room" (although this room was little-used on the coastal passage) and he and Janet made much use of this facility. They both went ashore in Port Elizabeth and East London with friends they had made aboard the ship and I dined with them and other passengers twice more before we arrived in Durban and we said "farewell". Undoubtedly, they were two of the nicest people one might wish to meet and undoubtedly they much enjoyed their voyage aboard "Edinburgh Castle".

It was obvious (when he smiled) that he had suffered a facial injury some time ago and Mrs.Smith confided in me that this was a wartime injury sustained when, in 1943, his fighter aircraft crashed during takeoff in the Western Desert conflict. He sustained a broken jaw and facial injuries. About a year later his aircraft was shot down over Northern Italy. He landed by parachute behind enemy lines but was "rescued" by anti-German Italian partisans with whom he spent several months before he managed to rejoin Allied forces in S.France. He was repatriated by U.S. forces and thereafter he flew combat missions until the surrender of Germany and he was "demobbed". In 1945, at the age of 26, he returned to university at Rhodes. He was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1948 and he became Prime Minister in 1964.

I was delighted to receive the attached letter a few days after I went on leave and to read that Mr and Mrs. Smith had enjoyed their trip as much as those of us who met them had enjoyed their company.

CRK 30.4.20



TO THE PRIME MINISTER,  
SALISBURY.

27th August 1974

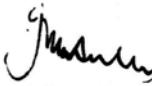
Captain C.R. Kelso  
5 Bursledon Heights  
Bursledon  
Hants., U.K.

Dear Captain Kelso,

The Prime Minister has asked me to write and thank you most sincerely for everything you did for himself and Mrs Smith during their recent voyage on the "Edinburgh Castle". They were quite overcome with the service provided on the ship, and have asked me to convey to you their very grateful thanks for all the trouble you took to make their trip so memorable.

With their very best wishes to you for the future,

Yours sincerely,

  
J.W.M. SNELL

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## [Yet another challenge for S.T. Challenge](#)



The steam tug Challenge, which has been languishing at 42 berth for some years, was the last steam tug to have worked on the Thames and is registered in the National Historic Fleet. She is perhaps best known for the role she played in Operation Dynamo, evacuating of troops from the shores of Dunkirk in 1940.

Supported by volunteers and the Dunkirk Little Ships Restoration Trust a new lease of life was on the horizon and she had an extensive refit at Hythe in Feb/March prior to being handed over to new London based owners.

After the dry docking she returned to 42 berth but the new deal fell through and they are now back to square one, desperately seeking a group, organisation, or museum etc. that would be interested in having a look at taking Challenge on.

We are in possession of a comprehensive report of the work carried out and many photographs.

It is the intention to post these on our website just as soon as I can overcome some of the technical hurdles in doing so.

Meanwhile here are a couple of the forty-odd pictures taken during the slipping.



Before & After



## Micromanaging the Master

### **Seatrade Maritime Comment and Analysis March 2020**

The pilot could barely contain his astonishment as he recounted the exchange with the master as he reached the bridge of the ship he had just boarded. There was, as he explained to the master, no berth currently available, so the ship was to proceed to the anchorage in the roadstead, where she could wait. But the master told him that he could not undertake such a manoeuvre without obtaining the agreement of “the office”, so they better steam around until the decision of “the office” had been provided.

This account is one of the more blatant examples of the increasing level of “micro-managing” that is being reported to professional bodies, who have expressed concern at the phenomenon. It might be thought of a trend that has been observed for some years, with complaints that while the traditional authority of the master was being constantly undermined, the master’s responsibility and liabilities were increasing apace. And with advances in technology, the facility of wonderful shore-ship communications, along with the ability to precisely locate the position of the vessel, have merely accelerated the process.

It is curious, but not many years ago, first class owners were becoming concerned that their senior officers were losing their confidence in making professional decisions about the conduct of their ships. It was about the turn of the century I participated in a company seminar run by a major tanker owner which was designed to assist their masters and chief engineers in solving their own problems, without calling for shore confirmation about their decisions. It was about “taking ownership” and persuading these senior officers that exercising their professional judgment was expected of them, and would not be criticised.

But that was then, and this is now and a few months ago there was a chief engineer complaining in a professional journal that he had to seek permission of his technical managers before he could undertake the most elementary repair or maintenance. He wondered whether this was what all his long years of training, experience and climbing through the ranks, had prepared him for, and whether he might find something more fulfilling. And there are regular forecasts about how the ability to use “big data” and for the technicians ashore to monitor the ship and its machinery in real time, will

further diminish the need for those aboard ship to exercise their technical judgement.

So in this changing environment, is it time there was a serious attempt to review the roles of these senior officers, whose decisions are second-guessed by those ashore, but whose responsibilities never seem to diminish? If a clerk in a charterer's office can haul the master out of his bunk at 2 o'clock in the morning (these blighters don't understand time-zones) to ask him why he has slowed down or castigate him for altering course around a cyclone, the concept of a "Master under God" has clearly long gone.

The emergence of a shore-side "operations centre" which keeps a real-time check on a ship's position and performance is no longer science fiction but established practice in a number of major lines. The cruise sector, after the trauma of the Costa Concordia, was quick to respond in such a fashion, and perhaps if technology enables management ashore to instantly be made aware of a diversion from a plan, it should not be ignored. But there is no getting away from the fact that if you want senior officers to remain engaged, and a crucial part of the ship-management operation, they need to be treated with respect and be more than a mere cipher on the end of a peremptory e-mail, or telephone call, questioning their every decision.

But the problem goes far wider when it is the master of a ship, who will be the person dragged into court, facing criminal charges, when the decision making that caused that problem was not his or her own. Where is the justice in that? If management ashore is to hold the reins, then they must bear some of the responsibility in law and liability. And this is why matters cannot carry on as they have always done, with the wretched shipmaster carrying the can. We need to talk about this.

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## Gone Aloft



### **Captain Anthony John Ireland, M.N., Lt.RNR. Retd**

Born on The Isle of Wight in 1943, Tony Ireland was educated at Taunton's Grammar School and Warsash Maritime Academy before joining The British and Commonwealth Shipping Company as a Cadet in 1959.

He served in a wide range of vessels and his final appointment with B&C was Second Officer of the mailship "Edinburgh Castle". During that time he became a "Cachalot" and joined the RNR where he attained the rank of Lieutenant. Thereafter, in 1970, he worked as a Compass Adjuster in Southampton until 1972 when he was appointed Master with Bulk Acid Shipping, reverting to Compass Adjusting in 1974.

1978 saw Tony serving as a Trinity House Pilot in Workington until 1982 when he moved to Libya as Mooring Master with the American-owned Occidental Shipping.

In 1986 he reverted to Pilotage, in Gibraltar, where he remained until his retirement in 2005 – when he married "Tete" and settled down in Sotogrande, Spain. In retirement he was a keen golfer who also enjoyed gardening and tending his fish pond.

Tony never lost touch with his seafaring friends and organisations and in 2015 he returned to the UK to march with the Union-Castle section of the Merchant Navy Contingent at The Cenotaph on Remembrance Sunday. He also attended the UC Reunion (hosted by Mike Morley) in 2016 and again in 2019 -despite his failing health. Later that year he was diagnosed with cancer and this took its toll, culminating in his "Going Aloft" on May 23rd.2020.

Tony will be remembered as a popular and efficient Officer with a keen sense of humour which he retained throughout his illness.

Those of us privileged to have known Anthony John Ireland extend our sincere condolences to Tete and his family members.

**The CACHALOTS**

**The Southampton Master Mariners' Club**

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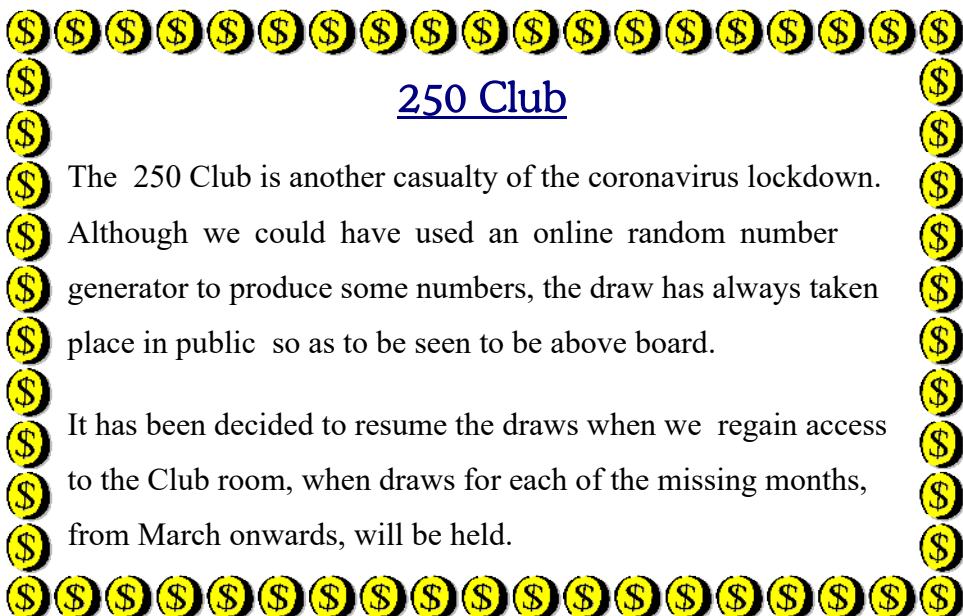
The Club room is currently open **two** days a week, Thursday and Friday, 1130 - 1500. Liz will be only too happy to serve you a drink. There is no catering on site but there are many sandwich outlets within easy walking distance.

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**

Thu 4 June Shipping Festival Service, Winchester  
Sat 6 June Curry Lunch, Kuti's Royal Pier

**CANCELLED**


  
**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.