

# ***The CACHALOT***

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

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**No 79**

**Digital Edition**

**August 2020**

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## Not the Captain's Log

*One of the hazards of trying to produce this newsletter monthly is that inevitably one of the regular contributors will not be in a position to make the deadline. In this instance our Captain is taking a well earned break from his demanding job at the MAIB. Not actually lying down in a darkened room, although that would be quite understandable, but enjoying some family time and sunshine in the West Country.*

*He says he will be back in time for the September edition when, hopefully, there will be something to write about. Perhaps we can look forward to 'What I did on my holidays'.*

*The summer months are usually lean ones, clubwise, and this edition, our fourth digital one, reflects that in that it is leaner than the previous three.*

*The writing competition,*

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

*,is now closed and hopefully the judges will have made their decision in time for the winning entry (entries?) to be included in the next edition of The Cachalot.*

*My not so subtle hints about Letters to the Editor have finally borne fruit but perhaps not in the way that I would have hoped. See p.5*

*In an attempt to address club business and other issues that have arisen during the lock-down, your Management Committee will hold a trial meeting by Zoom and if the technology can be mastered will hold another 'proper' meeting in September.*

*Meanwhile, another initiative has been taken to organise an informal virtual meeting for those members who are missing the weekly get-togethers in the club room. See the next page.*

*Terry Clark [editor@cachalots.co.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.co.uk)*

## Stop Press

### Informal Zoom meeting for Cachalots

As we are still unable to meet at the RBL, you are invited to join Robin Plumley for an informal virtual get together on Friday 7th August at 1100.

If you have Zoom and wish to join us, you will need to provide Robin with your email address which he will use to set up the invitation.

If you are new to Zoom, Robin is happy to assist you in getting set up and doing a trial connection.

Please email to [plumleyrobin@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:plumleyrobin@yahoo.co.uk) or [robinplumley@outlook.com](mailto:robinplumley@outlook.com)

*Please be aware that most of us will be very new to this technology and be prepared to make some allowances.*

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## Boatsteerer's Locker

Here we are still on lockdown and just about keeping sane with the date of my submission for the next Newsletter due today !

I have ventured out but only to Lymington Hospital after being diagnosed by photos that I sent to my doctor as suffering from thrombophlebitis in my left leg which spread from my lower to upper leg within a few days. My leg and lumps were subject to a scan and the leg diagnosed to be free from DVT. However I am on blood thinning tablets for 3 months before another visit.

Just before lockdown in March I noted that my eyesight was not up to scratch looking at car number plates etc. when driving I tried to have an eye test at the opticians but by then every shop was closed down. I struggled trying to read a newspaper and look at my computer screen with the aid of a magnifying glass to my right eye and being chauffeured around in my car.

Once restrictions had eased a bit I managed to get an appointment with the optician who confirmed that I shouldn't drive. The optician recommended that through the NHS he would try for an appointment in a private clinic. Yesterday I visited a private eye clinic at Whiteley for an assessment for YAG laser treatment on both eyes under the NHS. As well as assessing they lasered both eyes and today I can see, so can read my computer screen and newspapers without the means of a magnifying glass to my right eye which tired rapidly and my left eye everything was a blur. I can now also drive !!!!

I think that this is enough excitement for this Blog

Keep sane, safe and healthy

Ken Dagnall your cheerful Boatsteerer



## Cachalots 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-eight 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 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)



## 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.

## Letter to the editor

### **Political cesspit or topical social comment?**

*Dear Editor* - I always look forward to reading my edition of *The Cachalot* and consider it an oasis of interesting marine articles, and a haven from the unremitting onslaught of politics and opinionated bias of the mainstream media. I was therefore dismayed to read the (supposedly humorous?) poem – “the Ship of State” in the latest edition. I had hoped that a magazine like *The Cachalot* would be above printing such gratuitous political satire, particularly as there was not even a pretext of a marine context for it. In this day of instantaneous media, there are no shortage of left-wing publications where such a poem would have been welcomed. The discussion of politics was always absolutely forbidden on every ship I sailed on – and with good reason. This considerably raised the standard of conversation in our wardrooms!

Believe me, I have no liking or regard for Cummings: his attempt at justifying his actions as being within the rules were as insulting to the intelligence as they were improbable. But without in any way wishing to defend him, I would say in passing, that the media - in drawing mass attention and doggedly keeping that story in the news for far longer than it merited - undoubtedly did far more harm to public rule compliance, than the original miscreant did. This poem does nothing to help, either.

In any event, I do not feel it in any way appropriate to publish such a poem in *The Cachalot*, which is – or should be - a magazine which I believe should rise above the mire of political cesspit.

**Richard Leedham**

## Flag exercise

Further to our brief reminder of Morse code last month, Bill Hargreaves has come up with this quick exercise in two-flag signals. Shouldn't faze any old Bunting Tossers out there but it might tax the memories of some of us.



Bill writes:

Throughout lockdown, my wife (retired), my daughter (had planned to travel in her gap year), and son's girlfriend (furloughed) used the Sun room as a makeshift YouTube yoga studio. I "hoisted" a couple of signal flags in the doorway.

But what does it mean? Where did you put that copy of the International Code of Signals?



### Virtual meetings

Thinking of Robin Plumley's invitation to a virtual club meeting using Zoom, I thought I would use this bit of white space to list some of the advantages:

No travel costs - no parking fees

Never mind the weather - dress as you feel comfortable

Drinks at home prices - drink as much as you like

Catering just like at home - if you stay that long

Join and leave as and when you like - mute them all at the touch of a button

No need to join the discussion, you might like to just put faces to some of those names

Who knows what it might turn into - we will just have to give it a try

'See' you there

TEC

# Repatriation – someone else’s problem

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

Maybe we shouldn’t be surprised at the disappointing governmental attendance at the recent summit on crew changes. The brutal truth is that in most countries, the situation of merchant seafarers and the crewing of their ships rarely will intrude into official consciousness. And if those weaving the red tape which prevents seafarers leaving and joining ships are backed into a corner they will probably suggest that it is not their problem, but that of the shipping industry for manning their vessels in such an inflexible construct. “If you want to crew your ships with people from all corners of the globe”, they will be thinking, even if they don’t actually say it “then it’s up to you to sort out their repatriation and replacement”.

We might consider that this is just one of the unfortunate vulnerabilities of the modern shipping industry which has been exposed by Covid-19. Ship owners will argue that they have been forced down this road by both costs and availability of crews, to seek out sources of labour from wherever they can be found in the great maritime manpower bazaar. If the users of ships will not pay a reasonable rate for their sea transport, and history tells us they won’t, the industry has to cut its cloth accordingly. No argument with that.

Of course it was a whole lot simpler when liners sailing out of the UK filled up their berths with British crews, and sub-continental traders changed their crews in India, China operators in Hong Kong. You will find maritime antecedents in so many Chinatowns around the world, if you trace back far enough. It was even possible for tramp operators to man their ships with Somali firemen from local communities that had sprung up in South Wales and the North-east. But we are never going back to this age, and indeed if Covid-19 hangs around as many predict, we better get used to developing a regime that will work in the new dispensation.

But if countries cannot agree to co-operate and agree on the special status of seafarers and continue to erect ridiculous obstacles preventing seafarers getting from a ship to an airport and thence to their final destination, it really is up to maritime employers to look for alternatives.

Some are doing so and at considerable cost, using empty cruise ships on long passages to repatriate crews to their country of origin, or at least to a reasonable transit ports where seafarers won't be treated like lepers in medieval times.

But for the main body of ship operators around the world, collectively requiring the exchange of 200,000 seafarers per month, but with individual shiploads of just tens of individuals, they have to think more imaginatively. We have in recent years become used to the duration of the tour of duty being regarded as almost sacrosanct, people being relieved wherever there was an airport that could be used for on-carriage. Maybe people will have to become used to crew changes wherever they are most practical and closest to the source of manpower, even if that means making the actual tour longer or indeed shorter. Maybe there will have to be more diversions, with the agreement of charterers, with the crew being elevated to a more equal status to that of the cargo in the priorities surrounding the voyage.

But it still comes down to governments, and immigration departments, and officials making seafarers jump through needless hoops to obtain transit visas, and that means facing up to those absentees at the global summit, where only 15 governments were represented. "It is the turn of governments to play their vital part and cut the red tape" said BIMCO's new secretary general David Loosley. But it remains all too easy to say that it is someone else's problem, in an industry that is essential, but over the horizon. As everyone is enjoined to celebrate and thank the health workers, shopkeepers, train drivers, dustmen and all the heroes of the pandemic, tell me where anyone ever thanks the merchant seafarers for keeping their home fires burning and food in the larder. International solutions? Immediate action? Don't hold your breath.

**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.**

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## Our first Bursary Beneficiary

*Matthew Nicholls was the first recipient of our Bursary award when it was introduced in 2009. (See the Bursary pages on our website, or click [here](#))  
Now Deputy Master on the Queen Mary 2, he brings us up to date with his career since then.*

Just over eleven years ago I was honoured with a bursary from Southampton Master Mariners Club towards fees for my Chief Mates course at Warsash Maritime Academy. A lot has happened over these intervening years, so I thought I would update you with a brief summary of the past 11 years, and try and give you a small insight into life on a passenger ship with no passengers!

At the time of receiving the bursary I was living in Torquay with my wife Kate. In September 2009 we made the decision to move back towards where our parents lived in Oxfordshire, just in time for the birth of my first son Samuel. After passing my oral exam I was offered the opportunity to cover two Second Officer gaps, firstly on the Pacific Sun which was a P&O Australia ship based in Brisbane, and secondly on Ocean Village 2 based in Heraklion in Crete. At the end of 2009 I joined the P&O ship Aurora, one of my favourites in the Carnival UK fleet, and this would become my second home for the next 4 years. The following year I was promoted to First Officer, a rank that I thoroughly enjoyed. As First Officer you are the ships Navigator, responsible for passage planning as well as being the Bridge Manager overseeing the other watchkeeping Officers. I was lucky to sail with some excellent Captain's while on Aurora and I value the time on that ship immensely for my professional development.

I returned to Warsash for the final time in 2011 and attained my Master Mariners Certificate, heading back to the South West to take my oral exam at the MCA in Plymouth. 2012 saw another addition to the family with the birth of my second son Jack. During 2012 I also returned to Cunard, initially on Queen Elizabeth as Safety Officer but later on Queen Victoria and Queen Mary 2. The Safety Officer role is a step away from the Bridge and navigation, and also an end to watchkeeping which was very welcome! As Safety Officer I was responsible for the maintenance and servicing of all lifesaving and fire-fighting equipment, as well as the organising of

drills and training. I enjoyed managing the small team of ratings that reported to me, and also enjoyed the practical aspects of the job – even occasionally getting my hands dirty! In many ways this is an eye opening rank, where for the first time your regular interaction with colleagues from other departments provides an insight into the whole ship operation.

Thankfully I managed to get home just in time to see my third son Edward born in February 2015. I was promoted to Deputy Captain in July 2016 and was appointed to Queen Mary 2 later that year, before joining Queen Elizabeth in 2017 where I remained until earlier this year.

As I write this I am approaching the end of a contract as Deputy Captain on Queen Mary 2, and what a strange three months it has been. We are reduced to a skeleton crew of just 110 people, comprising approximately 40 from Deck, 40 Engineering and 30 Hotel. Our time is spent mostly at anchor off Weymouth, with the occasional trip to Southampton for stores, fuel, garbage off-load and the majority of our crew changes. We are of course making the most of the opportunity to complete lots of maintenance while there are no passengers onboard. The sound of needle guns and chipping hammers is ringing out across the Dorset coastline as we work our way through passenger balconies! But there is no doubt that walking through a largely empty ship, through the usually buzzing bars and restaurants, is an eerie experience.

The cruise industry has enjoyed many years of growth and certainly nobody could have predicted what a catastrophic impact Corona Virus would have. But as I write this we are looking forward to returning to service, with some ships within the Carnival Corporate umbrella looking at August to start taking passengers on holiday once again. As for Cunard and Queen Mary 2, we will wait and see.

It has been interesting writing this article and reflecting on my career so far, which I can honestly say I've enjoyed (almost) every minute. As I look back I consider once again how immensely grateful I am to the generosity of the 'Cachalots', offering that much needed financial support to a fellow seafarer. Our extended yet close knit seafaring community is certainly being tested at the moment, although I am confident we will prevail and emerge from this challenging time stronger and more efficient than ever!

Matt Nicholls

## Ode to a lost Sea Temp Bucket

*Cachalot Peter Moth has contributed the following verse – penned many moons ago when he was 3rd Mate on mv Star Boxford, a 40,000 dwt geared bulker trading between British Columbia and Japan. He writes:-*

Unusually, for a British registered vessel, we reported our meteorological readings to the Canadian Met Office and won their ‘Best Weather Reporting Station’ (or whatever) prize two years running. Sceptics commented that this was probably due to the very few vessels that were crazy enough to sail great circle routes across the northern North Pacific in Winter! Admittedly, it was common for us to receive forecasts that bore a striking similarity to the observation reports we had sent in 6 hours previously but, hey, without anywhere to seek shelter they were primarily of passing interest only.

For the uninitiated, the sea bucket was a rubber container, about 30cm long and the diameter of a fire hose, that was lowered from the bridge wing into the passing foam via a heaving line. Here it collected a sample of surface water that was lifted back to the Bridge where it had a temperature check by way of an inserted thermometer. Often the bucket took quite a hammering, buffeted both by the wave crests and by being slammed against the ship’s side during launch and recovery. The temperature reading - along with other observations such as air temperature and humidity, wind and sea state and direction, barometric pressure, cloud formation and precipitation - were coded and relayed back to the relevant Met office for analysis and forecasting.

Presumably, these terrestrial observations have now been fully superseded by satellite readings but I would be interested to know if any of the data is still observed and collated by watchkeepers.

By way of an update to those that knew me previously, I have now retired as Chief Executive of the UK Harbour Masters’ Association, a role I undertook for 21 years – but I continue in a part-time role in my publishing and events business, Maritime Intelligence Ltd.. I am also frequently called-up by my son’s inland waterway dredging company, Harbour Clean Ltd, as an extra pair of hands to assist in a watercourse or lake dredging/clearance operations – I can thoroughly recommend spending a day or two operating a 9T excavator as a most therapeutic activity in ‘retirement’.

Pacific storm of early year,  
was of its worst that night.  
The sky was black, no moon did show,  
To shed the simplest light

Despite the gale, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Mate knew,  
his 'obs' the world awaited,  
so to the bridge wing he did go,  
to launch the bucket fated.

The bucket flew in wondrous flight,  
its tail an arc depicted.  
Away, away it went all right,  
the rope was unconnected.

Oh, was it fate or evil hands,  
or simply rotten hemp.  
The only fact we'll ever know,  
in this Watch, there'll be no temp !

To waters calm, the bucket drifted,  
and beached on distant shore.  
It served its purpose long enough,  
and went to sea no more.

*Peter Moth*

*3<sup>rd</sup> Mate, mv Star Boxford (on passage, British Columbia to Japan)  
1978*



## Early days

Our President, Captain Reg Kelso MBE, recounts more memories of his wartime experiences.

In 1939, at the age of 11, I was living in Doneybrewer House, Eglinton, a few miles outside Londonderry, N.Ireland. with my Mother, Father and brothers Billy (16) and Derek (6). Doneybrewer was a small farm and my brother and I each had ponies and the other farm animals comprised cattle, sheep and poultry. My father was Managing Director of a wholesale tea and coffee importing business coupled with a wholesale grocery store in Londonderry. The outbreak of WW2 in September of that year had little initial impact but, as the months passed, changes came thick and fast. Early in 1940, aircraft runways and hangars were laid and constructed in the pastureland adjoining ours and, in 1941, RAF Eglinton was established as the base for No. 133 Squadron RAF (which flew Hawker Hurricane fighters) and later, in 1942 No.41 Squadron RAF flying the new Supermarine Spitfire.

Living next door to an airfield which was operational 24 hours a day with noisy aircraft passing overhead with scant clearance quickly reduced our quality of life - and continuous sleep became a virtual impossibility - so, in late 1941, we moved to Ballyorr House, Newbuildings - some 4 miles the other side of Londonderry. In 1943, the station was re-allocated to the Royal Navy and became a Fleet Air Arm airfield called RNAS Eglinton (HMS Gannet), home to 1847 Naval Air Squadron providing air cover to the Western Ocean convoys as part of The Battle of the Atlantic.

Londonderry, at the top of Lough Foyle, had always been a small but busy commercial port serving the coastal traffic - passenger and cargo- to Great Britain, The Irish Republic and further afield but the outbreak of war was to change all that and, undoubtedly, it played a major role in The Battle of the Atlantic which was being waged against the German U-Boats whose mission was to disrupt and destroy the lifeline convoy supplies crossing the North Atlantic from the USA, Canada and Newfoundland. Londonderry's strategic location and sheltered river quickly provided operational naval bases for the Royal Navy (and later the US Navy) and in early 1940 the Admiralty began work on the infrastructure of what was to become a major resource for warships providing convoy support and protection.

Early in 1941 (before Pearl Harbour and the entry of the USA to the

war in December) Roosevelt and Churchill drew up a secret agreement (The Lend-Lease Agreement) which would allow US bases to be developed in N.Ireland and Scotland in return for resources for the UK's effort including money, ships and vital supplies. Following on from this HMG signed a contract with an American construction company to begin constructing bases in N.Ireland and Scotland using 50 million USD of the Lend-Lease funding. The contract called for the construction of a main base for the US navy at Londonderry for destroyers and submarines (and repair facilities) together with a base on Lough Erne (County Fermanagh) for Catalina Flying Boats and Rosneath in Ayrshire, Scotland, for destroyers and submarines together with repair facilities.

Within a few days some 350 American personnel arrived in Londonderry to begin the work. Initially, they were billeted in HMS Ferret -the renamed army barracks at Ebrington - but later, as more arrived they moved to newly constructed camps on the outskirts of Londonderry.

The construction that ensued was on a massive scale and included a 700 metre jetty connected to the shore by three piers complete with a narrow gauge railway, a mixed fuel tank capable of storing 100,000 barrels, a huge ammunition storage facility and two new barracks on the outskirts of Londonderry. The city's small shipyard was expanded together with larger repair and machine workshops and mooring points were put in place along the quays on both sides of the River Foyle.

February 1942 saw the US Naval Base commissioned in Londonderry (the first in Europe) together with a radio communications station. Soon a large detachment of US Marines arrived to guard the new facilities and Londonderry effectively became the main terminal for the arming, repairing and refuelling of convoy escort vessels. By 1943, the base (HMS Ferret)was handling on average 150 escort and anti-submarine patrol vessels, 2000 shore based personnel and 20,000 UK and Canadian seamen. The base, together with airfields at four locations nearby afforded the necessary protection for the convoys of vital equipment crossing the North Atlantic.

Londonderry was protected by an array of barrage balloons, 24 heavy and 12 light anti-aircraft gun supplemented with the fire from the many warships moored alongside. Somewhat surprisingly, the cities major

strategic and operational role never attracted the Luftwaffe but - a single damaged bomber did attack the city in April 1941 and dropped parachute mines which killed 13 civilians and injured 30+.

America was attacked by Japan (Pearl Harbour) in December 1941 and, at that time, the US Government had some 70,000 men working on overseas projects in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. International law made it illegal for civilian workers to "resist an attack" ; to do so would classify them as "guerrillas" and could lead to summary execution. It was, therefore, essential that these vital technicians became "militarised" and this task was undertaken by Admiral Moreell whose concept model Construction Battalion (CB) was a U.S. Marine Corps battalion of construction tradesmen capable of any type of construction, where needed and under any conditions or circumstances. Moreell achieved his objectives with amazing rapidity and today's CB's are unchanged from his model. Little wonder they were described as "a phenomenon of World War 11"

Working with amazing speed and skill the CB which now comprised some 14,000 workers (7000 active and 7000 in reserve) transformed the port facilities in Londonderry into a highly capable naval base before turning their attention to the many other facilities requiring their attention in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

By 1942, we three boys were attending Foyle College in Londonderry. This posed travel problems so in mid-year we left NewBuildings (and our ponies) and moved into the city - DeBurgh Terrace. The houses each had a long grass garden at its approaches and the first thing my father did was to order construction of an air-raid shelter - a very sturdy cement building capable of accommodating about seven people albeit in somewhat cramped conditions. The only time it was ever occupied was the night the damaged German aircraft dropped its sea-mines on the outskirts of the city killing 13 civilians. My elder brother was an ARP messenger and he had just departed home on his bicycle when we heard the explosion.

In June 1942 I attended a House Party sponsored by a Christian organisation (The Crusaders) and became friendly with two young men - one from Bangor and one from Belfast. The both spoke in glowing terms

about their "Sea Cadet Unit" and, when I returned to Londonderry I immediately initiated enquiries about this organisation. It transpired that Sea Cadets were a product of The Navy League and so I wrote them a letter asking why a major naval base did not boast a Cadet unit. They replied promptly, inviting me to a meeting in Belfast to discuss the matter in detail. Accompanied by my father I turned up as invited and it was obvious that they thought the letter had been written by my father and not by me ! Thereafter, events moved quickly and with the VERY generous help of Commodore Simpson, the Base Commander in Londonderry, a dockside shed was quickly converted into palatial accommodation, uniforms purchased and Officers appointed. Recruitment was almost instantaneous and by September T.S.Enterprise (our allocated name) comprised four Officers, three Petty Officers and 24 Cadets. Four months later it was a biggest unit in N.Ireland with its own marching band !

Commodore Simpson saw to it that the Navy locally afforded the cadets controlled access to many of the naval vessels berthed alongside and even allowed them to travel with the ships on the rare occasions when they were non-operational. One one occasion three cadets were embarked on a destroyer engaged in leisurely engine trials in Lough Foyle when the ship was suddenly instructed to investigate a U- Boat sighting off Moville in the Republic. They spent several hours ensconced in the Wardroom whilst the warship searched in vain for the intruder.

August 1944 saw the decommissioning of the US base in Londonderry but this was not the end of the US Navy presence in Londonderry and the Radio facility remained operational until 1977.

The German surrender in May 1945 saw the base play an important part in the surrender of the U-boats that had preoccupied it for so many years. In total, some 60 U-boats were instructed to proceed to Lough Foyle (Lisahally) and surrender, with their crews being temporarily interned in HMS Ferret. The majority of the boats were scuttled off Malin Head and the North Channel but a few were retained by allied naval forces.





## Lash up and stow

### **Baird Maritime Workboat World Grey Power August 2020**

It appeared, at first glance, to be an ancient artefact, something that demanded the attention of skilled archaeologists, with their carbon dating machinery, after some farmer's plough had brought it to the surface after aeons underground. It was, in fact a container twistlock, badly corroded and photographed by the diligent inspectors of the UK's Marine Accident Investigation Branch. They were investigating an incident which had occurred in the North Pacific in October 2017, when the container-ship *Ever Smart*, on her eastbound passage, had lost 42 containers in heavy weather, damaging 34 others from the ship's aftermost bay in the deck stow.



It is an interesting and rather topical report \*, not least because of the announcement by the Australian authorities that they are to initiate a focussed inspection regime on container security over the next months. Maybe that should not be surprising, after two incidents of container losses off their coasts, the latest of which saw a ship detained and her master charged, with deficiencies in the lashing equipment alleged.

The MAIB report is perhaps doubly welcome, because it is clear that the sea carriers are going to have to smarten up as coastal states make it clear that losses offshore will no longer be tolerated as they were once. It is no longer something that can be just written off as a consequence of “heavy weather” and more forensic and analytical procedures will follow such incidents, which will be bad both for the bottom line and the reputation of the sea carrier involved.

The MAIB have looked at the weather that was suffered by the ship, what was done to mitigate its effects, and took a close look at the ship's lashing arrangements and the state of the containers themselves. It is a report that really needs close scrutiny by everyone involved in the carriage of containers by sea, with a great deal of useful information contained within. It might suggest that carriers need to be looking more closely at their container securing arrangements, with an eye to more regular maintenance, repair and replacement, while ensuring that once at sea, there

are sufficient hands available to make sure the lashings remain tight.

There probably is no mystery about the punishment these lashings suffer when in use, both from the corrosive and salt-laden air to which they are exposed and the strains from the stacks working in a seaway. The pictures of bent and damaged turnbuckles, lashing rods and twistlocks would probably not seem that remarkable to those who work on deck on container ships and the lashing gangs in port. But while it is not exactly the ideal time to be advocating more money to be lavished on lashing equipment, it would appear such is demanded by the changing climate of opinion.

The inspectors looking at the damage aboard the *Ever Smart* also took the opportunity to closely examine and weigh the 107 boxes that survived the collapse of the stack, which fell over to port in what must have been an alarming fashion (although nobody witnessed it in the dark). There appeared to be quite a lot of containers that were damaged by corrosion and a number had weight variances – one over 50% in excess of the declared weight. This suggests that there is still work to be done to persuade shippers of the importance of accurate weights and descriptions of cargo.

It just underlines the valuable work of the US National Cargo Bureau which, from time to time has pointed to the potential that may be found behind the innocuous doors of a steel box. Their latest study, undertaken in 2019, saw 500 loaded containers inspected at random, revealing that 44% had problems with the cargo securing arrangements, 39% had improper placarding, while 8% was discovered to have misdeclared cargo.

I suppose we really ought to discover whether this is worse, or better, than the situation in previous NCB surveys, which I recall showed up some real horrors, both in terms of misdeclared weights and undeclared hazardous cargo. You would like to think that mandatory requirements are beginning to make a difference. People who run container ships, urged to minimise port time and having to take on trust what others tell them are contained in the huge numbers of boxes exchanged, perhaps need to be given a bit more confidence. And if the scrutiny of the authorities is to be enhanced, maybe that is not a bad thing all round.

Curiously there still does not seem to be any real consensus about the optimum height of container guides above the deck. I was looking at a picture of a new OOCL ship which had the “racks” extending six boxes high,

which would seem to be a lot safer than relying on so much portable lashing. Stevedores, however, express reservations about the time lost in digging into the stack when these have to be circumvented. What do I know?

And while one should be cautious injecting a personal note into this topic, my next door neighbour tells me that last week he was opening a 40 footer with the shipment of electric vehicles he had been eagerly awaiting for some weeks. There were three of these in the box, all, to his chagrin, with squashed bumpers, because nobody, on the other side of the world, had seen fit to lash them in place.

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\* You can find the MAIB investigation report [here](#)



### The CACHALOTS

#### **The Southampton Master Mariners' Club**

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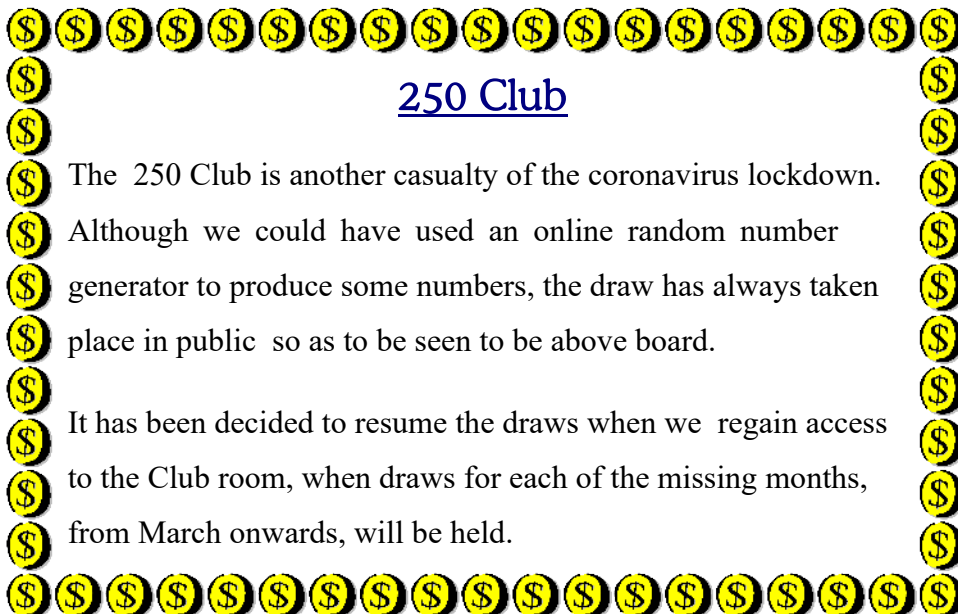
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Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure. We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.

  
**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.