

# ***The CACHALOT***

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

---

**No 80   Printer Friendly Digital Edition September 2020**

---

## Captain's Log

And the winner of the John Noble essay writing competition is [pause for at least 20 seconds to build tension], ..... but before announcing the winner, and hold you in suspense for a little longer, back at the beginning of lockdown John offered a bottle of the finest Malt Whisky for the best essay titled: *How I kept sane during the Covid-19 scare*. The article was to be not more than 1000 words in length, but otherwise the field was open. In true Cachalot spirit, most of the entrants steadfastly ignored the word count limit and let the prose flow. Ian Odd, Ken Dagnall and I were chosen out of a cast of thousands to be the judges (I think that was to keep us from entering), and we were delighted to receive six entries. Nonetheless, the authors knew their stuff, and rumours of book deals abound.

Anyway, to cut to the chase the winner, much against the run of play, was your very own newsletter editor, Terry Clark, who will be signing autographs once lockdown is over. Two entrants tied for second place, and with not a cigarette paper between them these were John Noble (who could not really win his own prize) and Reg Kelso. The entries will be published in this and successive newsletters, so you can judge their quality for yourselves.

Turning to more pressing matters, the Management Committee will be meeting in early September to try and map out the Club's way ahead for the next few months. Although the Grand Café opened for business last week, social distancing rules restrict the numbers they can take. So, with time marching on, it was with some regret that the decision has been taken already to cancel this October's Trafalgar Dinner. The committee will, however, be discussing the viability of running the Sea Pie supper at St Mary's in February 2021. It will be a difficult decision whichever way it goes, as not only does the event need to be possible from a social distancing perspective, we also need enough people with the confidence to attend to make it financially viable.

In a similar vein, the Committee will also be discussing the possibly of re-opening the Club Rooms for business on Thursday and Friday lunchtimes at the Royal British Legion. The Legion is now open again, but with reduced seating so only able to cater for limited numbers. The Legion's management are happy for the Cachalots to start meeting again, and the Committee will have to decide whether or not that is practical in our smaller upstairs room. Keep an eye out for *Cachalites* reporting on all of the above in the next couple of weeks.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> September marks Merchant Navy Day, and there will be a very small ceremony at the Civic Centre in the morning as the Red Duster is hoisted. I will be unable to attend, but Past Captain Robin Plumley will be attending on behalf of Southampton Master Mariners. It is hoped that there will also be a short service at Holyrood Church on Sunday 6 September, led by the Mission to Seafarers Port Chaplain, John Attenborough, where I will represent the Club. Given current circumstances, I'm glad that both events are taking place, even though attendance will be restricted.

The weather over the last week has signalled, if such a signal were necessary, that the summer is drawing to an end. The schools are opening their doors for a full return of children, and everyone is keeping their fingers crossed that we will not see a second spike of the virus this autumn. Whatever happens, please bear a thought for the cruise industry. Although it is quite novel to see so many cruise ships and liners at anchor off the Isle of Wight and Dorset coast, while they are at idle their owners are losing money at a phenomenal rate, and the bottom has dropped out of the used-cruise ship market. My neighbour's daughter has just been laid off by Carnival, and it made me realise how many jobs in and round the city are linked to the cruise sector. It is quite sobering to think that even if many industries can bounce back quickly, the cruise industry, which is so much part of our city, has been even harder hit than the airlines and will likely take a long time to recover.

Keep safe

Andrew



## Boatsteerer's Locker

Having ventured out of my lockdown bunker and just about keeping sane after my visits to Lymington Hospital and the Optegra Eye Clinic as related in my last blog I have not ventured very far, only going down to Hythe Marina in the heat wave for the cool breeze and an ice cream and noting very little traffic in the port.

Returning home I decided that we should have a BBQ so dragging out my old gas fired unit I managed to cook some corn on the cob and Aberdeen Angus burgers without anything getting too charcoaled. Dusting the cooked burgers with a Barbecue Sauce which contains 1% Tennessee Whiskey (obviously the cork had been passed over the bottle) we enjoyed the finished cooked product.

Having ventured out of the bunker we took advantage of the August meal deals valid on a Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday and visited with trepidation a cafe for lunch in a garden centre on a Tuesday after buying numerous plants for slug food. Social distancing and sanitisation was the order and we had an enjoyable inexpensive meal for two .

With the world's cruise industry at a standstill and their crews stranded aboard ship on 25<sup>th</sup> June 'UN Day of the Seafarer' the sacrifice of key workers at sea was highlighted.

With thanks to Past Captain Robin Plumley we now have a Zoom 'get together' every Friday morning at 11-00 hrs, the first 'get together' attracted Cachalots in Mexico and in Kent as well as local members (why not join us). Incidentally Robin will represent our Club at Southampton Mayor's MN Flag Raising Ceremony on 3rd September.

On the home front chaos will shortly reign supreme when some of our Sevenoaks family will visit for a few days.  
Keep smiling, healthy and sane Ken D.



---

## Zoom Virtual Cachalot Meeting 21 August

Since 7<sup>th</sup> August we have been holding a weekly virtual meeting using Zoom. The initial meeting saw ten members and by the 21st we had 16 members join us.

Today in one meeting we have had 16 members: Terry Clark, Michael Cox (Maidenhead), Reg Kelso, Ian Odd, Peter Grant, Douglas Gates, Ken Dagnall, Ian Thomson, Ken Edwards, Paul Leece, Barry Peck, Forkanul Quader, Bill McRea (Italy), Les Chapman and Gerry Cartwright.

Well done and many thanks for joining our virtual meetings. I have set this up to repeat for the next ten weeks. The info was included in Cachalite No.167. (Meeting ID 421 735 0675 , then the passcode: 5Zj7mh ) or you can just click on the following link which will take you straight there.:

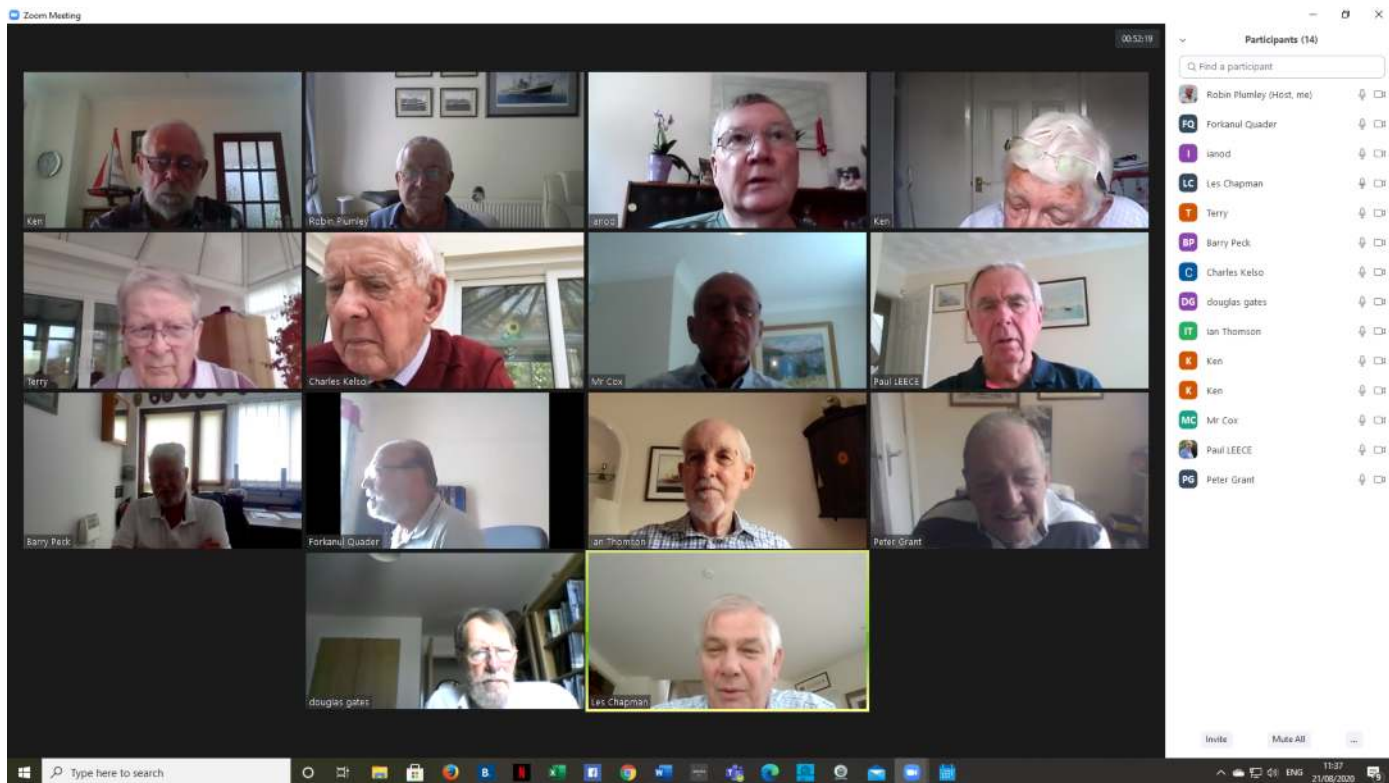
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4217350675?pwd=ZGJocmFSNXVPZ2F3NTFmSVNLWDVoUT09>

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)

Robin

*So we are not all Luddites after-all. We have eschewed Facebook, Twitter and all the rest of the social meaja, but have embraced digital editions of this newsletter and now Zoom. True to say that we were all fumbling a bit with the technology, mainly the sound levels, and the conversation is a bit stilted at times, but perhaps we will adopt the protocol of putting our hands up when we want to speak, just like being back at school - if they still do that. Ed.*



Screen shot taken during the meeting on the 21st, Bill McCrea (taking a well deserved break in Italy) and Gerry Cartwright yet to sign on.

## 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-nine 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)

## 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.

## Letters to the editor

Sir,

I prefer to waste my time womanising, (unsuccessfully I'm afraid), rather than writing letters to publications, but I feel that I must comment on Richard Leedham's letter. Whilst I would uphold his absolute right to express his opinion, I'm afraid that I must disagree with part of his letter, as, to me, it smacks of censorship of the worst kind. Our Club has a reasonably diverse membership of intelligent people, with many different life experiences and interests, and I think that our magazine should reflect that. I heartily agree with Richard's opinion of the media and political personnel in general, but the media have to sell their products to make money, and we are free to publish whatever we please without fear or favour. Whilst I agree that the "Cachalot" should have broadly nautical content, many of our members have outside interests, and are able to produce articles on different subjects if they are so inclined. Our overworked editor is forever cajoling people to write articles for publication: Barrie Youde's poem may not be of great literary value, but it filled a white space, for which our editor was, no doubt, grateful.

Gerry Cartwright

Dear Editor

I have noticed that the Digital Newsletters no longer have on their back page a box with 'the cut-off date for the next edition' which I believe will limit members submitting articles for inclusion.

I think that you are doing a great job keeping the members interested in the Club.

Ken Dagnall

*OK Ken, it's back*

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

*There were just six entries received for the writing competition, all of them from Past Captains, which perhaps indicates their ongoing commitment and support for the Club. Here is the winning entry.*

### Tits up

#### **We are all going to die!**

As far as we know, nobody has ever got out of this earthly existence alive and I think that by the time one has reached three quarters of a century one has reconciled oneself to the approach of the Grim Reaper, in whatever guise. *Que Sera, Sera* as Doris Day used to sing. So it is with some incredulity that I have watched the Government's attempts to stall the inevitable by beggaring the nation and bugging the economy, mainly on behalf of those who wouldn't have lived to experience any benefits anyway. And the cost of each new initiative! With a few billion here, and a few billion there, here a billion, there a billion, everywhere a billion, who's going to pay for it all? I think I know the answer and it's not Old MacDonald. The world's gone mad!

#### **There's nothing on the telly.**

Perhaps some relief from the lockdown could be found on the goggle box? I quickly lost interest in the propaganda programme each afternoon and Saturday night's peak viewing now consists of a lanky ex footballer conducting a guest show where everyone is obliged to keep to the anti-social distancing rules and try, rather too hard, to inject some humour into the situation. One week, the real hoot was that his co-presenter, a comely, well-endowed lady, was dressed in some skimpy shorts and an even skimpier top which came just above the nipple line. Every time she moved I was waiting, goggle eyed, for one to pop out. Yet nobody in the studio seemed to notice anything, studiously ignoring the elephant, or rather the two elephants, in the room. One of the guests was a sullen, foul-mouthed, billionaire pop star, dressed in a black donkey jacket like he didn't have two pennies to rub together. Another night, another pop star, probably just as rich, was filmed sat on a stool in the middle of a field, plucking his guitar and grizzling and moaning. Entertainment? Is it me? The world's gone mad!

#### **Box on the box.**

But one box has come to my salvation, a bird box on the side of the house, which has a bird-cam connected to the TV indoors. A blue tit was visiting the box from as early as mid February to 'measure up'. It would spread its wings and do a little rotational dance, testing the space. It brought in a few sprigs of moss and would push these around the box in a very haphazard fashion. This went on daily during all of March and I began to suspect that this bird brain was perhaps an inexperienced young bird with not much idea of how to build a nest. I raked some moss from the plentiful supply in the lawn and placed it in a tray beneath the box. Frustrated by the lack of response, I then poked some through the hole, forcing the bird to at least distribute it around the box a bit. I was shouting at the screen, urging the dick-dick head to build a proper nest.

My wife was muttering something about not inflicting my control freakery on the poor birds. ??

It was not until the middle of April that my not so subliminal messages started to get through and she (got to be a female) commenced building a real nest, bringing in feathers and other nesting materials. The previously observed dancing routine turned out to be a way of bulldozing the stuff into the semblance of a nest. Weaving it was not, but after a few days there was a slight hollow in the middle and she started roosting overnight. More feathers and material, more bulldozing and finally, on April 23rd, an egg appeared, followed by another each morning until there were seven.



She seemed to spend a lot of time away from the nest and I was concerned that she might be letting them get cold. She had arranged the eggs into a hexagon, with the seventh egg in the middle. Thus, each egg was in contact with both its direct neighbours and the one in the middle. This central egg touched each of the other six. Ain't nature wonderful!

Every time she came back she would re-arrange them but always maintaining the hexagonal shape.

She then started incubating proper, but still leaving the nest occasionally and fussing over the eggs on her return. She was being fed occasionally by her partner. Seventeen days after the first egg was laid, three of them hatched, followed the next day by two more and the final two on day 19, 13 days after the last egg was laid. So, although the eggs were laid over seven days, all those absences and shuffling of the eggs was her way of controlling the temperatures so they all hatched out over just two. Ain't nature wonderful!

However, on day 21 one died, followed by another two on day 26. There was a definite disparity in the sizes of the chicks with a couple of them seizing the lion's share of the food brought in by both parents. By day 29 we were down to three and two days later just two remained. Again, one dominated when food was fetched in, spreading his tiny wings to prevent his sibling from getting a share. Day 34 saw the end of the weaker one and the survivor fledged on day 35. Ain't nature wonderful!

### It's all a dream

*I am having a nightmare. I am the sole survivor of a brood of blue tits and my natural instincts are compelling me to fledge and vacate the security of my nest. The lifeless body of my last remaining sibling lies putrefying beside me, its very presence compelling me even more to get out of there. As I peer out through the entrance hole I see a black and white bird, not a magpie, but a jackdaw, wearing his grey wig just like the judge, jury and executioner of small birds that he is. The white on his breast is a number.... two digits..... yes, what is waiting for me when I finally venture out.... is.... **CORVID-19!***

They say that dreams can reveal the state of our minds and I think that, like Yossarian in Catch 22, because I don't want to die then I must be sane. Just me, all the rest of the world has gone mad.

Terry Clark

*In the judges' opinion, and I quote, "The winner, by a short head and much against the run of play, was Terry (congratulations), with John and Reg neck and neck for second place. They were chased over the line by the rest of the pack, and it was all a close run thing."*

*Reg Kelso's entry, in verse, and that of John Noble, which were judged to be in joint second place are printed here over the next few pages. The entries from the runners-up will be included in the next newsletter.*



For those of us hailing from Ireland,  
March 17th. Is a memorable day,  
But.....this year.....very few of the exiles  
Had reason to join the affray.

No Guinness, no shamrocks or laughter  
Celebrations were not part of life  
'Cos the dreaded Wuhan coronavirus  
Had hit us - with consequences rife.

The pandemic, as we now choose to call it  
Soon spread to the West from the East  
Taking its toll without mercy  
Like some ravenous wandering beast

Soon, total lockdown was inflicted  
On all of us, wherever we dwelt  
And the battle to fight off insanity  
Began, ere the boredom was felt.

Like many, I cleared out the garage  
Restowing the stuff on the shelves  
Then replacing it tidily elsewhere  
Same, I am sure, as yourselves.

The next week - as I started my car clean  
The polish and things were not there  
After buying some more up in Tesco's  
I put the rest back where they were

The next to attract my attention  
Were the gardening "things" here and there  
So ..I took them out.....and replaced them  
But close to where they once were

Next day. She was looking for cutters  
That had had pride of place in the store  
But, after an hour or more of searching  
I went out and purchased some more !

Weeks later, I tackled the upstairs  
But ...does this have a familiar ring ?  
When you shift and restow on a Monday  
Then - on Tuesday - YOU CANT FIND A THING

So, the moral of this little saga  
is sit down and let the time pass  
Things are where they are for a reason  
so leave them  
...and sit on your a ..bottom !

C R Kelso

# How I Kept Sane During the Covid 19 Scare

BY

**John Noble**

I suppose the first question to pose is:

Did I remain sane?

Assuming the answer is “yes” then this contribution will remain valid; if the judges think “no” the contribution must be disqualified (see my final comments)!

My sanity was tested throughout lockdown mainly by a series of uninvited guests and requests. I have also looked at one rather controversial issue and offered a solution. See below:

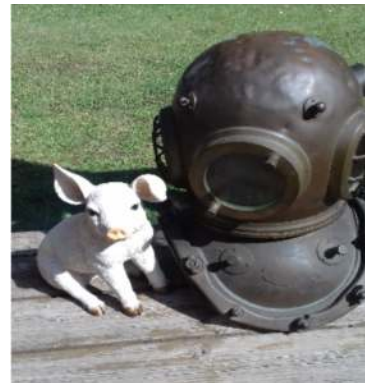
a) **The gremlins.** At the peak of lockdown the water gremlins visited on three occasions. First, they invaded our immersion heater and fused the power circuit. To do this they crunched up the collected limescale in the tank and rendered it unusable. It cost a fortune to remedy. Not finished there, they then assaulted the bath drainage system causing a leak that damaged the ceiling below. Finally they visited a toilet flushing system and caused a leakage that required immediate first aid!

b) **Mugwump** The wind gremlins blew down our fence and in making the fence good, one of the visitors was Mugwump. This creature is a bearded dragon lizard. Quite harmless, but fearsome to look at. Mugwump was quite happy to wander round the garden, munching anything that took his fancy, flowers were a speciality!



c) **The Duck family** Sitting outside in the garden enjoying afternoon refreshments, we saw what looked like a few ducklings crawling under the garden gate. We were only drinking tea, so alcoholic illusions can be ruled out! We then spied the mother duck, who was leading her hatchlings up the side of the grass (I hesitate to say “lawn”). They had a good poke around for about 30 minutes, before leaving. Some of the more interesting visitors!

d) **Face covering** A feature of lockdown has been the controversy over the mandatory use of face coverings in shops. Keeping away from my personal views, I have found the ideal object to provide suitable covering for the face. It is also useful when self-isolating. Piggy found the helmet useful too when forced to self isolate.



e) **The Elephant** We were due to celebrate our Golden Wedding anniversary in early May. Lockdown forced us to postpone the planned celebrations and second “honeymoon”. Indeed the jumbo present I had planned for Louise was held captive in the jewellers until it could be liberated in early July. I think that I did manage to pay off all my negative brownie points! Time will tell!

f) **Zoom** I suspect many of us had never heard of ZOOM and had little knowledge of its place in lockdown life. All of a sudden we were zoomified by all kinds of organisations. I was asked to prepare a talk

to be presented over ZOOM.

Perhaps surprisingly, this worked and an audience of over 150 participated in the on-line conference. Often as not these presentations when delivered live will attract maybe 30 to 50 delegates. ZOOM seems to have changed all that. All this means that some form of intellectual sanity was preserved during lockdown!!



## **Final comments**

As mentioned at the beginning, did I remain sane during lockdown? I think I did, but there is every possibility that others may form a different opinion. It needs two doctors to declare otherwise and the judging panel may have to consult.

In conclusion, please dear readers, stay safe and sane.

John Noble



## Rule Britannia – Liverpool Speaks

I am a son of Liverpool, which traded once in slaves.  
When I was but a boy at school I saw the world behaves  
In different ways at different times in many different places;  
And different behaviour might be seen as airs and graces.

Today the world sees slavery most utterly abhorrent,  
Where once it happened on a scale equivalent of torrent:  
And still it happens, round the world, if rather less well seen.  
Reality, undoubtedly, sees all of it obscene.

I have no liability for things before my birth.  
I had no choice in my conception, here upon this Earth.  
And, as to slavery, I know that Wilberforce abolished  
The trade in slaves and duly earned a reputation polished.

All England followed suit and did its best to stamp it out;  
And ruled the waves in doing so, with necessary clout.  
All credit be to Wilberforce. He had the strength to warn  
And set to right a heinous wrong before I had been born.

If ancestry means anything I credit claim therein  
That Liverpool continued in the trade at Bight Benin,  
In full compliance with the law as Wilberforce amended,  
Accepting, as it had to, that the slavery was ended.

The sins of my forefathers on my shoulders do not rest;  
And fortunate am I that here and now I can attest,  
That Liverpool redeemed itself in later wartime glory  
And earned its place in honour in the long evolving story,

To let the world in freedom live, as should have been the case,  
For all humanity on Earth in any sordid place,  
Without restrictions, save of course, that each of us behaves;  
And Britons never, never, never shall be slaves.

BY  
26.08.2020

# Deaf ears to seafarers' pleas

## Seatrade-Maritime Opinion & Analysis August 2020

If you ignore a problem, maybe it will go away. In the way that the seafaring community continues to be treated by responsible governments, this would seem to sum up much of the collective attitude of the authorities around the world, faced with requests to land or exchange ships' crews. Of course, it is so much easier to deny such requests, with a suggestion that the shipping company tries somewhere else, at the next port perhaps? What are a few more days, or weeks?

There is also a nasty ring of cynicism and exploitation in the prevailing view.

- We are delighted for your ships to come to our port, bringing us the goods without which we would be in real trouble, and carrying off our exports to market all around the world. We don't mind admitting we depend upon these argosies of trade for the flourishing of our economy in the post-pandemic world.

- But because of Covid 19, that universal excuse for everything, including the suspension of decency and humanity, it is not possible to exchange crews in this port. We realise that this is forcing your crew members to work weeks or even months over their contracts and that their replacements need access. We understand that this might make the ship seriously in breach of international maritime conventions. We have taken on board your earnest injunctions about the fatigue suffered by your employees, but our own health requirements over-ride everything else. Besides, the fact there are no air services that can facilitate the exchange puts the ball firmly in somebody else's court.

- No, your crew members may not have shore leave to go to the shops, the doctor, dentists or other health professionals. The fact that your ship is said to be free of the disease and the deep-sea voyage to our port has occupied many weeks is immaterial. No, they may not go and play football on the dock. They must stay on board their ship at all times, facilitate its cargo handling, albeit with appropriate social distancing and hygiene measures, and depart on schedule. Your agent is free to arrange for any fuel or consumables to be delivered to the ship, so our suppliers will in no way be disadvantaged.

It is a bit like arguing with a computer, that always says "no!" A computer that is completely oblivious to the fact that these vital ships which everyone depends upon are driven around the world by human beings, who cannot be expected to be treated like 200,000 Flying Dutchmen, doomed to circle the seas forever. Certainly, at enormous effort and considerable cost, hard-working companies have been able to relieve some of their employees, but they succeed in the face of often rock-like resistance and endless difficulties placed in their way.

Because it is always someone else's problem, which can be shunted off elsewhere, there is absolutely no need to consider any of the consequences. There have been suicides apparently provoked by the absolute inability of a distressed seafarer to return home. There have been endless warnings about the risks to safety, caused by exhausted individuals undertaking safety-critical tasks and getting them wrong. Only when a few brave souls decided that they have had enough, and the ship will not be leaving the berth without crew reliefs, as we have seen in Australia of late, might the intransigent authorities be persuaded to think a little deeper about their attitude. One would like to think that there will be no victimisation of these courageous crews, but one wouldn't put money on it.

When this is all over (or we have learned to live with this disease) I wonder what seafarers might think about their treatment. More to the point, what might potential seafarers, who might have thought that there was a place in this essential industry for them make of those who treated the current workforce like lepers. It won't exactly spur them on to a maritime career, will it? I thought of that crass old creature Nancy Astor, first woman in the British House of Commons, who blithely suggested that seafarers should be required to wear distinguishing marks on their clothes to warn that they might be transmitters of venereal disease. Some attitudes don't change.

**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)*





# All things come to those who wait

In edition 36 of *The Cachalot*, June 2010, our late archivist Hamish Roberts wrote an article 'From Sail to Sat-Nav' (Captains of The Cachalots 1928 - 2010). [Read it here](#). In it he lamented the sad lack of information we hold on some of our Past Captains, particularly Captain S. Braithwaite MBE who was one of the founder Cachalots and Hamish made an appeal for any more information. Now, ten years later, that plea has borne fruit.

We were contacted by Dr Jo Stanley FRHistS, who is currently Research Fellow at Hull University's Maritime Historical Studies Centre and had come up with Capt. Braithwaite's name in her researches and subsequently found our website where many of our past articles are posted. She seemed to know more about him than we did and after an exchange of information she included some of our Club's history in her latest Blog <https://genderedseas.blogspot.com/> It is printed here with the kind permission of Dr Stanley. She also has her own website: <http://www.jostanley.biz>

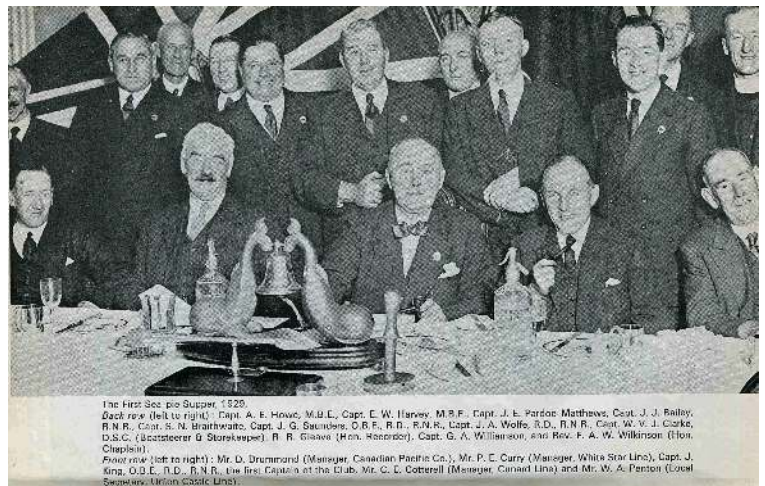
## Male allies of 'mistress mariners': 1928

'Should – could – a woman be given a master's ticket? In effect, could a member of the 'fair sex' ever be a ship's captain?' That was the formal topic discussed at Southampton Master Mariners Club in late May 1928. By fluke I've just discovered this debate, while looking through online newspaper archives. 'Thirty-one members ... laughingly voted against, and two have solemnly voted for, the suggestion that women are fit to command ships at sea,' recorded the UK's Truth.

The picture shows some of those Southampton Master Mariners' Club members a little later, enjoying their first Sea Pie Supper, 1929. The founder, Captain SN Braithwaite, is fifth from left on the back row.

Why does one local discussion matter? Because it was so well-publicised. And it reveals contemporary thinking about the gendered sea, in one of the most significant ports anywhere.

'Women's Place on Board Ship' was the first debate the club had, after it was founded in February 1928. And the SMMC's members' words had a global impact in the English-speaking world. Newspapers in the US and Australia announced the decisions taken by these Hampshire captains of some of the greatest ocean liners. Although the articles didn't make the front-page, many ran along the lines of the Lowell Sun's: 'Old salts object to women mariners.'



## **Equality in context**

At that point in the UK women's equality was anyway a hot topic. The Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act was due to come into effect in only four weeks' time, on 2 July. This law meant that, at last, all women had the vote.

And a yachtswoman, Lady Rasch, (c1880-1944) (pictured) had just been awarded her yachtmaster's ticket. Katherine's feat was greatly acclaimed in the society pages of newspapers, including in the US, that month.

Actually the British Board of Trade had, since 1907, been allowing women to be awarded yachtmasters' certificates, although it may only have been an honorary award before Lady Rasch's time.

Lady Ernestine Brudenell-Bruce (1871-1953) had begun the fight for that right in 1898, when she was not allowed to take her ticket at the end of her course at a Liverpool Nautical College. She leaked the BOT correspondence to newspapers as far away as New South Wales.

Mr Ingram R Walker of the BOT told Ernestine 'I am directed by the Board of Trade to state that they have always considered and held that a "master's certificate" clearly implies that it is confined to men.'

She carried on sailing anyway. So did some other unticketed yachting stars such as Mrs Grace Schenley (pictured, courtesy of Classic Boat Museum, Isle of Wight).

Furthermore, women officers were already on liners. Since 1919 ships had conductresses who acted as social workers for solo female emigrants. And nursing sisters had been accorded officer status on ships for two decades.

Victoria Drummond (pictured, courtesy of Catherine Drummond-Herdman)) had become the world's first female marine engineering officer in 1922.



## What a question

So why weren't women fit to command ships – or even work on them as deck officers – according to the conservative, and possibly tongue-in-cheek, chaps of 1928?

There's much confused reporting, which ignores – ahem – the slight difference of scale in the business of commanding a yacht as opposed to that complex cluster of operations, the ocean-going ships.

But the two main reasons appear to be:

1. 'The life of the sea breeds characteristics, particularly in the way of vocabulary, not best suited to female comradeship' went one argument in the Truth. Presumably this was a metonymic way of saying that women belonged to a separate and more refined culture. Therefore mutual intelligibility was impossible.

2. Sex-segregated space on board would be required, as the women worked their way up the ranks. 'Whether they enter as apprentices or ordinary seamen, women would have to be berthed apart from the rest of the crew ... I cannot imagine shipowners relishing such an additional demand upon space' was another obstacle raised in the Truth. The same argument was still being used to exclude women from 'men's jobs' in the 1970s.

## Bossy boots

The Truth's writer thought the discussion in the press which led to the Master Mariners' vote 'started from the wrong end.' He focused on unladylike bossiness: 'That women have the mental ability to take an extra-master's "ticket" nobody will doubt. That a large type has fitness to command men anybody with knowledge of boarding house landladies will readily agree.' (Such businesswomen were stereotyped as the epitome solo female tyrants). The H Ryder Haggard characterisation of a woman as 'She who must be obeyed' had been jocularly circulating for 38 years by then.

However, the Truth also added somewhat sensibly 'But command of a ship is a goal at the end of a long and very hard road ... and the real question is whether women have the physical and temperamental endurance to travel that road.'

Leaking Pipeline Syndrome is still a problem today. The obstacles to women 'flowing on' in a lifetime career are now recognised as including that: the on-board social climate can be hostile to women, even on passenger ships shipowners' non-family-friendly working arrangements force women to choose between motherhood and career.

## How to solve the problem?

So what was to be done, in 1928? In a world where all training ship cadets were male the Truth's reporter suggested 'A training ship for women might meet the case up to a point ... but at the end of their probation the same difficulty of "mixing" would occur.'

'The real solution would seem to lie in an all-woman "manned" ship,' (something partly attempted in 1960s China).

The Truth then mentioned precedents: that women disguised as men had got on quite successfully in the maritime past: 'celebrated examples of successful disguise [included] ... Hannah Snell, Mary Read, Ann Bonny, and Mary Ann Talbot.'

He did not deduce that these disguised women's success (in low-ranked shipboard roles) proved that the problem was not women's actual lack of intrinsic competence.

Rather their feats were proof that trouble only occurred because men imagined that any woman who was visibly female must somehow be too cowardly to climb up masts or to survive bad voyages without going into hysterics over the wet chintz cushions or possible damage to her nail varnish.

## Male allies

It's no surprise that the elite Southampton gatekeepers protected their professional enclave. But it's telling that two men voted for in support of women - if only for the pleasure of playing devil's advocate. Today women recognise that male mentors are important. In 2017 the Women's Engineering Society instituted the Men as Allies Award.

But who were those two enlightened masters mariners nearly a century ago, who deserve retrospective awards?

1. The first can barely be traced. Captain SN Braithwaite, MBE, was at that time the Marine Superintendent for the Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and seemingly in his 50s. In WW1 he had been honoured for his part in the Dardanelles campaign, as captain of the troopship Cardiganshire, which took soldiers out to Gallipoli.

He had organised the founding meeting of the SMMC, in the RMSPC staff dining room, just a few months earlier. He later went on to become Staff Captain, then Captain, of the Club. In 1933 he became president of Southampton Shipping Golf Society. So maybe his opinion carried some weight. In other words he was popular and a networker. Often male supporters of maritime women were fathers of lively daughters, but his family life is not known.

Captain Braithwaite declared to the press 'We have women mayors and councillors, women lawyers, women doctors, why not women master mariners? Personally I should not mind serving under a woman master.'

2. Maritime women's second ally was John Archibald Rupert-Jones, the hydrographer to the Southampton Harbour Board. Then 54, he had been decorated for his RNR service in WW1. And he was esteemed for his survey of St John's harbour (1912) and Chronological Order of the Introduction of Steam-Propelled Vessels into the Royal Navy' (1927).

He was married to a farmer's daughter, and had grown up in an applied intellectual and taxonomic situation: John's father was the distinguished professor of geology and palaeontologist Thomas Rupert Jones (1819-1911). Thomas had been teaching at Sandhurst when John was born. This background may suggest John was a person who would not have readily tolerated untrained, undisciplined people 'interfering'. In other words, he wouldn't be someone to gallantly support just any women fancying herself in gold braid. But he would be able to make space respectfully for those who were competent.





## Beatie Fry: mutiny 'absurd'

John Rupert-Jones named Mrs Beatie Fry as a 'living example of a woman who would be a capable master mariner.' The Press Association journalist on the story gathered some quotes from Beatie Fry (formerly Holme Sumner, 1862-1946). Then aged 66 she was one of the best known female authority figures in Merchant Navy circles as, effectively, the head of the training ship Mercury for three decades.

From girlhood she had been notorious for her 'manly' disregard for feminine conventions: she rode astride, wore masculine clothing and had been involved in a sex scandal.



'She who must be obeyed': Beatie with her friend Admiral Sir James Somerville to her left. These images are from Ronald Morris' biography of her, *The Indomitable Beatie* (2004).

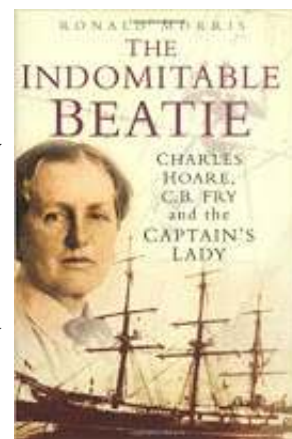
Beatie Fry joined this SMMC debate by asserting she would 'have liked to see women given the chance of becoming master mariners. The necessary qualifications which she named, nerve ["not nerves"], comprehension, self-control, and stamina were, she considered, present in some women as in some men.'

'She herself frequently led the boys of Mercury aloft, a feat which she considered presented no difficulty to the average woman. Like [Prime Minister Stanley] Baldwin, she was convinced you cannot cheat the sea: competence for the job, and competence alone, can save a skipper's face and make a skipper's reputation.'

'Such competence would, she considered, be recognised and revered by a crew as readily in a woman as in a man skipper. Mrs Fry's robust and generous faith in her own sex is both convincing and refreshing' opined *The Woman's Leader*.

'Asked "What about mutiny?" Mrs Fry said "There would be no fear of mutiny if a woman were in command. As for sea-sickness, a woman is no more liable to sea sickness than is a man," reported the *Nottingham Evening Post*.

Two weeks later Captain Thomas Luther Evans, who had 29 years' experience, told the *Western Mail* her claim was 'absurd and impracticable.' He 'would strongly advise her to drop a subject for which she is totally incapacitated.'



## Women today

'Today thirteen of the club's 250 members are women,' says Barry Peck, acting for the membership secretary of the SMM Club. 'Of these, five are Master Mariners and one is a Younger Brother of Trinity House. times have moved on since 1928.'

Captain Rachel Dunn NMN, is an example of this. (Pictured on the Admiralty pilot boat after bringing in HMS Dauntless, Portsmouth 2015) She joined (the Club) in 2000 when five month's pregnant with her twin girls.

'It's a great place to have knowledgeable collective discussions about how to create a comradely happy ship.'

She found the members were still so unused to female captains that they mentored her and saw her as a novelty. But they respected her endeavour.

When she became the first female captain of the Club in 2019 she did not want her gender to be commented upon in the media. 'I was a ship's master and my qualifications were just the same as those of any other captain of the club,' this STEM ambassador told me this week.



## What does it mean?

This SMMC debate, and its global publication, is not only a really useful way of understanding gendered social ideas about women in authority in the maritime past.

It's also a way of figuring out which women were being seen as significant in the maritime world of that period: the notorious Beatie Fry, Victoria Drummond, and Lady Ernestine Hunt (nee Brudenell-Bruce). Their aristocratic backgrounds helped them rise.

By contrast their forbears, such as Hannah Snell, succeeded despite being working-class, because their gender was invisible to their shipmates and because they did not seek authoritative positions.

--  
(The author is grateful to Barry Peck and Terry Clark of the SMMC, and to Rachel Dunn, for their co-operation over this article).



## Anything but Text

What next? I'm bound to wonder, as I try to master "Text"  
Upon my mobile 'phone which serves to make me yet more vexed,  
Because I do not understand, quite how the damn thing works.

What error and what pitfall in just using it now lurks?

Grammar? Do not speak to me. Nor yet of punctuation.

Gibberish is what I see in much communication,  
Transmitted, as I now am doing here, by electronics,  
May God forbid deception by these means or histrionics.

Communication is a gift, with clarity its crown.

The best of memory submits to something written down.  
So let it be that writing, when it's done, is clear and proper:  
And let there be no glottal stop nor conversation stopper.

Let there be due clarity by proper punctuation,  
As mileposts and as signposts leading to a destination,  
Where we might meet in understanding and a common mind.

It's not too difficult to do. Seek and ye shall find.

No man can curse communication, yet. That's how we live:

By knowing one another and our errors to forgive.

Do not text me please. The bloody keypad is too small,  
To let me answer properly or answer you at all!

BY

15.08.2020



## A hand shake through history

When Past captain Ian Thomson was a boy he was taken by his uncle, Robert Bruce Read, on a visit to Yarmouth in the I.O.W. to meet Captain Arnold Graham Cole, who was a friend and colleague of Ian's great uncle, Capt. George B. Thomson. Capt. Cole, MBE RNR, who had spent 40 years at sea until his retirement in 1925, was the only son of James Arnold Cole, clerk to the old Corporation of Yarmouth and its successor, the Town Trust, a member of a family settled in the island for more than 300 years. His grandfather, Henry Dennett Cole, was custodian of Carisbrook Castle and his mother was a member of the Webb family who were Solent and Channel pilots for generations.

At the age of 15 he was apprenticed to the British Shipowners' Company of Liverpool and made his first voyage in 1885 in the full-rigged ship *British Yeoman* bound from London to San Francisco. He remained in this vessel for six years, visiting Australian, Indian and Chinese ports. He continued in sail long enough to qualify for his master's certificate but, realising that steam would soon oust sail, served for a time as third mate in a tramp steamer on voyages between the West Indies and ports in the Gulf of Mexico.

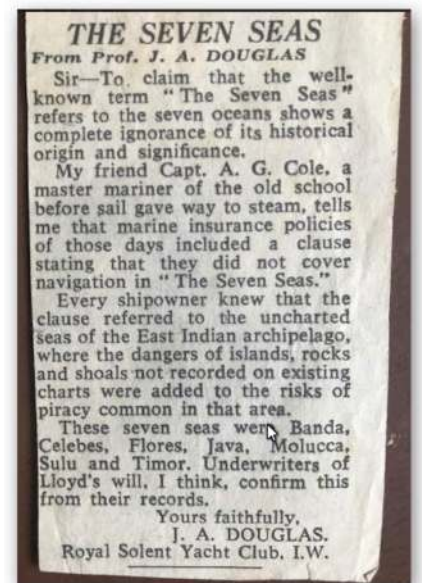
Capt. Cole then joined the Donaldson Line and was appointed to his first command in 1897, the *Orthia* from which, as a sub-lieutenant in the Royal Naval Reserve, he was entitled to fly the Blue Ensign. At 28 this made him one of the youngest if not the youngest master mariner in the Merchant Service.

In 1898 he was responsible for the rescue in the North Atlantic of the master and 10 of the crew of the dismasted American barque *St. Lucie* which was abandoned in a waterlogged state in a gale. Capt. Cole was presented with an inscribed gold watch and chain for the rescue by President J. McKinley and also received a gold medal from the Life Saving Association of New York.

Capt. Cole lost the watch and chain together with all his personal belongings when the steamer which he commanded in 1916, the *Kelvinbank* (John Black and Company of Glasgow), was sunk off Havre by two German torpedoes. Within a month he was in command of another vessel and was busily employed carrying munitions and remounts from American and Canadian ports until the end of the war.

Capt. Cole stayed ashore in 1920 to supervise the building of the new refrigerated steamer *Cordillera* of which he took command until his retirement in 1925.

He became prominently connected with the work of the Yarmouth Lifeboat and in 1952 was elected Hon. Life-Governor of the RNLI after 18 years as Hon. Secretary of the Yarmouth Station.



No date or provenance to this clipping from the Thomson archives



He was also author of 'Yarmouth - I.O.W. - Some records of an ancient town' published in 1951.

*Sea Breezes*, to which he was a regular contributor, recorded his death in 1962 at the age of 93. He was still living in 'Landguard', the house at Yarmouth where he was born. His housekeeper, incidentally, was called 'Mrs Seaman'. Ian revisited the house in later years but did not meet the then owners.

Ian remembers that Capt. Cole told him that when he himself was a boy he had shaken hands with a man who had been at the Battle of Trafalgar and that Ian should tell that to his own grandchildren. So, perhaps at the end of this century, Ian's grandson, Oswald, can tell his grandchildren that their great great grandfather had shaken the hand of a man who had shaken the hand of a man who had fought at Trafalgar.



# Destroyed by technology

## **Baird Maritime Workboat World, Grey Power, September 2020**

It is a terrible thing to see, a big ship wrecked and torn apart by a remorseless ocean. The miserable pictures of the giant bulker on the once pristine shores of Mauritius show a grim sequence of a grounding that initially did not look that calamitous, then with each day passing the situation inexorably deteriorating. First the Indian Ocean swell took charge and spun the empty ship on her axis to ground the stern, then, with the bunker tanks breached, the deteriorating weather broke her back and tore the whole cargo section adrift from the remainder of the vessel.

The sheer scale of the incident was what surprised, with this being a nearly new Capesize vessel, but there is no arguing with the sea, whatever the size of ship. Only the aerial pictures of the grounded bulker, and the miniscule tugs, gave a sense of proportion. And while this was an empty dry cargo ship (neither a tanker or a container ship as it has been identified by mainstream media), there was sufficient heavy oil on board to make the most awful mess of beaches, mangroves and coral reefs, on an island renowned for its natural wonders.



Well, they have hauled the forepart off for scuttling in deep water and there will be months of work for the wreck removal team, but now the focus will be on cleaning up the mess and determining the sequence of events that put this ship ashore. The flag state of the Japanese-controlled ship was Panama, an authority not renowned for the transparency of its accident investigation, but it is clear that the Mauritian authorities will be pursuing their own enquiries, by means of criminal charges laid against the master and one of the deck officers.

Why on earth was this large and well-equipped ship, on her ballast passage from China to Brazil, passing so close to this island? In the days when navigators depended upon celestial fixes, it would be not uncommon to close an island to verify the ship's position, but those days are long gone.

Might the vessel's electronic navigation system have been playing up? It wouldn't have been the first time such an accident happened. Some years ago, a modern, fully equipped ship ploughed into an island off Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic because her electronic chart system had somehow "edited out" the presence of this obstruction on the vessel's passage plan.

A large container ship, according to the subsequent accident investigation, grounded on a shoal in the English Channel, simply because her electronic course had been laid right across the shallow water and nobody had noticed. Indeed it was only when the coastguard politely enquired why the ship had stopped that they realised that they were aground. There is no shortage of this sort of accident, contributed to by over-confidence in the clever equipment, failure to use alternative position finding checks such as those offered by eyes and wheelhouse windows, and what is often described as complacency.

It is simplicity itself to plot a vessel's courses into the system, compared to the old ways of laboriously hauling around paper charts, employing pencils, dividers, the old roller rule, notices to mariners, tide tables, and navigational warnings. Maybe it was easier to check when the poor old Second Mate had mixed up the scale of the chart and put the ship five miles off rather than ten ( guilty plea here).

Might both the ease of establishing a ship's position and the illusion of absolute accuracy given by those friendly satellites, sometimes contribute to errors directing a ship into danger? A couple of days with no sights and you certainly would not rely upon your dead reckoning position. But people really do rely on their GPS and the instant and trouble-free precision of its navigation, despite the regular warnings that they shouldn't. "We know exactly where we are", says the master to the pilot, who actually points out that there is a potentially lethal offset in the ship's GPS, which can be verified by the pilot's PPU, backed up by the good old Mk.I eyeball.

But if complacency, or arrogance, or a mistaken idea of precision conferred by super technology, helped to drive the ship up on the beach, it might, as has been hinted, be the curse of communications that was a major contributor to this oil-smeared disaster. Ships on their long, slow, deep-sea passages these days will sometimes close an island so that the crew can chat to their nearest and dearest on their mobile phones. Here again, we are reminded of several other navigational accidents caused because of the preoccupation of a navigator with a cellphone conversation.

Mindful of this, sensible masters and managers will closely regulate the use of personal devices on the bridge of a ship, mindful of the range of diversionary entertainment that might cause the watchkeepers to neglect their duties. But these accidents still happen. If the technology is available, the chances are that somebody will use it. And we shouldn't fall into the trap of condemning modern technology, rather than the stupidity of those who use it badly. But there is no getting away from the fact that while in the bad old days accidents regrettably happened, the sort of mess on the beaches of Mauritius is quite inexcusable.



**Published with the kind permission of Baird Maritime and the author,  
Cachalot Michael Grey.  
[rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk](mailto:rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk)  
(Pictures from gCaptain)**



The answer to Bill Hargreaves little teaser last month:

**UY** I am carrying out exercises. Please keep clear of me.



### **The CACHALOTS**

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

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

Tel: 023 8022 6155

Web site: [www.cachalots.org.uk](http://www.cachalots.org.uk)

E-mail: [office@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:office@cachalots.org.uk)

[captain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:captain@cachalots.org.uk) [staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk)  
[boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk) [storekeeper@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:storekeeper@cachalots.org.uk)  
[postcaptain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:postcaptain@cachalots.org.uk)  
[functions@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:functions@cachalots.org.uk)  
[membership@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:membership@cachalots.org.uk)  
[editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk)

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.

**The cut-off date for the next edition will be  
25th September 2020**

### **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.