

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 81 Printer Friendly Digital Edition October 2020

Captain's Log

September had a brief feel of normalcy about it, with the result that I can give something approaching a traditional Captain's report.

Work commitments prevented me from attending the hoisting of the Red Ensign at the Civic Centre on Merchant Navy Day, 3rd September, but Past Captain Robin Plumley was available to represent the Club on behalf. I was, however, able to attend the Merchant Navy Day memorial service held the following Sunday at Holyrood Church.

Built in 1320, Holyrood (or Holy Road) Church was one of the original five churches serving the walled city of Southampton. It played a key part in the city's history and, apparently, in the 1850s it was the place to be for seeing in the New Year! Unfortunately, like much of Southampton, it was badly damaged on 30 November 1940 when the city was targeted during the Blitz. The church remained derelict until 1957 when the ruins were partly restored and the church was dedicated as a memorial to Merchant Seafarers. The Titanic memorial fountain was re-located to the church on 15 April 1972, the 60th anniversary of that great vessel's loss.

Due to COVID, this year's service was to be cancelled, but it was reprieved at the last minute. Government restrictions limited the numbers able to enter the church to 30 attendees, but that did not detract from the occasion. The Mission to Seafarers chaplain, John Attenborough, led us through a short but moving service, the usual standard bearers were in attendance, and the Mayor of Southampton, Councillor Sue Blatchford, led the laying of wreaths. I spoke to a number of attendees afterwards, who were all very pleased the service could be held. As an aside, John is hoping to be ordained in Winchester Cathedral next summer and would welcome a crowd, restrictions permitting, so once I have the date I will pass it on.

September also saw the Management Committee meet in person for the first time since lockdown began. It was actually a mixed media meeting, with a few joining in digitally, but nonetheless it was good to meet up in person. Our deliberations are reported elsewhere in this newsletter by the Boatsteerer, and I have written separately to all members updating them, so I will not repeat myself here. Unfortunately, it transpires that our optimism about re-opening the club rooms and, possibly, generating something of a social programme was mis-placed, and we are set for another period of separation and, in some cases, isolation.

Finally, on 21 September, I and a number of other Cachalots attended the funeral of Ann Morris, who many members will fondly remember, which was held at Romsey crematorium. COVID restrictions did not prevent there being a good turnout, and many had to remain outside the chapel to listen to the service. Ann wrote the service herself, and it was a most moving send-off.

Very finally, turning to matters of the sea, I would like to welcome Steve Masters, who has just taken over from Phil Buckley as the harbour master here in Southampton. I hope we will be able to invite him to the Sea Pie Supper in 2021, if not before.

Keep safe.

Andrew Moll, Club Captain



Our President tells us:

About a month after I was appointed Chief Marine Superintendent for British and Commonwealth Shipping, my Secretary and a.d.c. (Ann Lancaster) was lunchtime shopping and came across this in the form of a hang-up notice:

MY JOB

**It's not my place to run the ship, the horn I cannot blow
It's not my place to say how far the ship's allowed to go
It's not my place to chart the course, nor even toll the bell
But let the damn thing start to sink
AND SEE WHO CATCHES HELL !**

She hung it on my office wall and there it remained throughout my 12 years of office.

Reg Kelso

Boatsteerer's Locker

'Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more' so Henry V said as related by William S. as I once again attempt my blog. How quickly the Editor's plea for my blog comes around, even in our bunker.

I had to venture out for a visit to the dentist – nothing serious just a check up of my few remaining pegs.

I enjoy the Friday session of Robin Plumley's Zoom meeting, it's a pity that not more Cachalots join us for our social discussions. I attended a Zoom presentation by the Dorset Ship Society one Saturday afternoon the subject was the Carnival 'Vista Class' of cruise ships and their next talk in October is about "The history of 'Marco Polo' cruise ship". If anyone is interested please let me know for a guest invitation, incidentally their web site is www.shipsdorset.org

Last week when the weather was a bit warm we gave the car a run and ventured to Lepe Beach near Calshot for a 'Mr Whippy' ice cream which we enjoyed after a wait in a small queue keeping social distancing. We were there for just over an hour and was rather taken back by the parking charge of £5, the ice creams therefore cost £5 each !!! (no wonder there were unoccupied places in the car park)

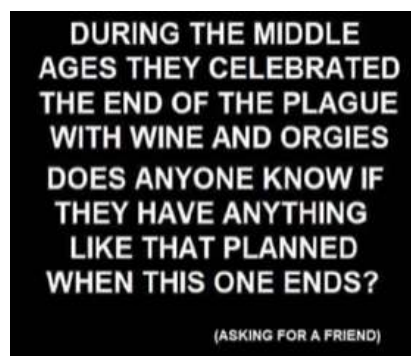
The Club had a Management Committee meeting in the RBL large downstairs room at the beginning of the month with 8 Harpooners attending in person and 3 via Zoom. The Minutes were recorded by the Boatsteerer elect Past Captain Plumley who also hosts our 'linkedin' site. It was decided that we would cancel our proposed Trafalgar Dinner and 2021 Sea Pie Supper due to the ongoing pandemic. The imminent reopening of our Club and Harpooner's Dinner and Christmas Lunch all seem doubtful at the present time. The Storekeeper reported that it is estimated that by the end of our financial year on 31st October the cash assets would be slightly more than the previous year taking into account increase from asset sales, no Bursary paid this year, less expenditure due to Club closing, no hard copies of Cachalot Newsletter printed and posted etc. It was proposed and agreed that the 250 Club shares validity be extended to reflect the months when no draws were made.

Club Captain Andrew Moll will write a circular letter to all Cachalots with an update on the Club Business.

On a personal note we were supposed to attend the wedding of our eldest grandson towards the end of the month but due to our age (just over 70) we are not allowed due to government restrictions, however this will not stop us from having a liquid celebration at home in front of a webcast of the proceedings.

Keep healthy, safe and sane

Ken Dagnall



The dramas continue in the supposedly quite cul-de-sac in Dibden. First it was the excitement of the high-tech laying of a new power cable in March, now it's elderly neighbours behaving like they are in an episode of 'Dukes of Hazzard'. Read on...

A Quiet Bank Holiday Sunday Afternoon

While the burra-memsahib was preparing a Roast Lamb lunch with all the trimmings (which was unusual as we normally have our main meal of an evening), I was sitting comfortably in my lounge with the TV switched on waiting for 13-45 when the 20-T Second Test Match England v Pakistan from the Ageas Bowl, in Southampton, was about to start.

Suddenly I heard a car engine revving up at full power and, looking sideways out of the lounge windows, I saw a car half on the lawn of my opposite neighbour's front lawn and half in the road with a part demolished concrete fire hydrant sign.

Going to the bay windows I saw the car, still at engine full power, shoot across our cul-de-sac and collide with the corners of our next door but one house with a tremendous bang. Next moment, still at full power, it reversed across the road into our front lawn bushes and came to a halt with the engine stopped, warning lights flashing and the damaged house alarm system activated.

Rushing out, I opened the passenger door as a neighbour's son had managed to open the driver's door in the bushes and was helping the driver out. Both air bags had operated and steam from the radiator was issuing from the badly damaged bonnet and front. We managed to sit the driver, who turned out to be the neighbour nearly opposite, in a chair as he was badly shaken.

Verifying that we couldn't smell petrol we managed to disconnect the battery and stop the warning lights etc.

As there was no sign of life in the damaged house a neighbour, who had a mobile phone number and key to the damaged house, contacted the owner, who was at a motor show at Beaulieu, to return home immediately. By that time entry to the house via the front door had been made to find that adjacent to the damaged wall the toilet water supply pipe was damaged and water was spraying everywhere. Shutting off the water supply revealed the extent of the damage to the corner of the house. The wall in way of the impact was bowed inwards. Cracks went up to the front bedroom window, along to the lounge bay window, along the outside wall above and below the door and down into the foundations. The driver, who was suffering from slight dementia, had no recollection of the incident but complained of neck whip lash. He was just getting his wife's automatic car out of the garage and must have lost control. Shortly afterwards the house owner arrived, then with sirens and flashing lights the police arrived, followed by the fire brigade and then the ambulance. The Driver was discharged from the hospital a few hours later as he only had mild whip lash.

After that great excitement in our quiet cul-de-sac we sat down to a very late lunch (or early dinner) with nothing burnt, only thick gravy !!!

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-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 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



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 and I will add you to the Kindle distribution list.

In the absence of any more letters or comments on "The Ship of State" in the July edition, here is a reply (in verse of course) from the author, Barrie Youde.

OBSERVATIONS

Mr Leedham, Mr Cartwright, how I thank you for your views,
For adding to the *CACHALOT* and editing the News.

No doubt you both are mariners, as also was my lot,
In course of which, few lessons likely are to be forgot.

The man upon the bridge is ultimately placed in charge.
Responsibility is his; and plainly it is large.

He must consider everything, as everything he sees -
The vital things which matter and the things which shoot the breeze.

Those vital things which matter govern all his working life,
Sustaining somehow mortgage, somehow family and wife,
By bringing home the bacon, keeping all devoid of taint,
Avoiding at the same time any damage to the paint.

These things he cannot do in blinkers, heeding only things
Concerning draft and speed and distance, windlasses and springs.

He needs to look about him, seeing all that's going on,
If he wants to see retirement; if he wants to carry on.

Thus, carry on I do , in my retirement from sea.
A lifetime spent in pilotage obliged me then to see
The mischief set by limits placed on any observation,
As *CACHALOTS* know very well in proper navigation.

Barrie Youde

1st September 2020

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

There were, in fact, seven entries for the writing competition, so not all of them from Past Captains. Pre-judgemental gremlins had sent the seventh straight to the Spam locker on the Captain's computer, something not easily spotted on gmail, which hides the spam folder two extra clicks down the menu bar and out of sight. Marking the entry using the same criteria the judges decided that there would be no change in the overall rankings.

Here are two more of the entries, the closing date for which is already two months past. That things can and do change so rapidly is poignantly illustrated below.

Memories of Lock-down 2020:

Leslie and Ann Morris.

Background.

Ann and I have lived in the village of Whiteparish in Wiltshire, situated almost equidistant between Salisbury and Romsey, (in Hampshire) for over 6 years. Our house is on the edge of a housing development of varying ages and types on the eastern side of the village.

We are fortunate in having one of the larger gardens, made to seem even larger by the fact it overlooks open fields and woodland to the north of the property. The front of the house faces west.

Lock-down

It became obvious from mid-March onwards that some form of lock-down was going to happen. Like most war-babies Ann kept a reasonably full larder and the weekly shop mainly topped up the larder. Consequently, the shortages we saw initially caused by over-shopping and greed were scarcely believable!

Our local shop in the village soon adjusted their already comprehensive selection of food and other domestic goods to a stellar selection: so much so in fact that word got out over the internet and "strange people" from places as distant as Downton and Alderbury etc began to appear. Of course their custom was welcome, but a form of rationing soon appeared. Of course, even though the shelves were empty of, say, eggs or butter, it did not mean that the shop was empty of the goods – somewhere in the back of the shop they might be found. Or so it would seem.....!

One of the phrases that irritated Ann and me was "*elderly people of seventy and over...*" in the context of risk, implying that if you were seventy or over you were a risk, but at sixty-nine you weren't. I wrote to our MP about this, pointing out that many people over seventy were performing sterling work as unpaid chauffeurs, baby sitters, bankers etc, etc. I fell asleep reading the five page reply I received. So I wrote to Lord Blunkett who was running a similar campaign at the House of Lords (his age, 72 years). His answer was two lines, to the effect that he and others the House of Lords (presumably the ones still awake) were doing something about it. The use of that phrase seemed to die down after that.

The weather, on the whole was excellent, so I was driven out into the garden by the Chief Gardner and we did quite a lot of trimming, cutting and preparation for the summer. We also saw a roe deer doe giving birth in the farmer's field door and tried and failed to count the number of young starlings and blackbirds that appeared, and continue to do so, despite the occasional presence a Sparrow Hawk, Kestrel, Red Kite, Honey Buzzard, and – allegedly - a Goshawk. And of course cats! (Not ours – they are too busy sleeping!). Mind you, the sight of about 30 jackdaws mobbing a buzzard has to be seen to be believed!

Yes, we are fortunate to have our house, and where it is. It is impossible for us to understand how people can live in apartments without gardens, or in any other buildings with little outside space or vista. In lock-down circumstances we feel for them deeply.

We missed the presence of friends (some of them having to endure more severe lock-downs due to ongoing health problems), open pubs, being able to go wherever we wanted, when we wanted. And yes, The Club. And now cricket (well I do anyway), from the stands.

At times we became despondent, Ann perhaps more so than me. I tried to analyse this, and kept returning to the same thought: the longest passage I made at sea. If memory serves me well it was 46 days from Newport News (USA) to Fukuyama, Japan, including a bunker stop at Antigua. The cargo was slack coal. I was Third Officer – with a 1st Mates Certificate! Yes, that seemed like a "lock-down" of sorts at the time, with the long haul over two oceans, followed by an "interesting" passage via the Sunda Strait (drawing 48 feet), through the Philippines and up the China Sea to Japan.

By my reckoning, the main part of our Covid -19 lock-down lasted for 51 days. Mentally, I compared it to a long ocean voyage, without the interesting bits. Ann, however, had no such experience to fall back on, her longest voyage being 11½ days from Southampton to Cape Town with me on the RMS "Southampton Castle". And even then she was invited ashore in St Helena! When it rained, we read books! The book I picked up from the pile in my study was "The Cruel Sea" by Nicholas Monsarrat, which I first read at the age of about 14 – 15 years of age. It puts modern life into perspective....

On the whole, our lock-down was not so bad, even though it began to pall towards the end.

After lock-down.

Since 13th May things have improved significantly, though for us there has been an additional problem.

On 2 July Ann decided to go for a brisk walk before breakfast. Unfortunately she tripped on a manhole cover about 100 metres from the house and fell forwards, injuring her left knee (although not broken) and scraping her hands, face and legs. Unfortunately it seems also to have exacerbated a previous injury in her back so she is in considerable pain at times. She is on pain killers, which cause their own problems. Further treatment will take place later this week, Thursday 30th and Friday 31 July. We shall see what transpires.

What did I say about “*elderly people of seventy and over...*” earlier?

Keep Healthy.

Leslie R Morris

Ann Louise Morris

25th January 1944 - 5th September 2020

Ann was admitted to Salisbury hospital in mid-August for further tests and sent home for palliative treatment only, under the care of the Salisbury Hospice Charity. She died just three weeks later on the 5th September.

Her funeral was held at the Test Valley Crematorium on the 21st September under Covid-19 restrictions of 30 inside and 20 outside. There were eleven Cachalots and wives among the mourners and the Service was watched by others at home by means of a live Webcast.

The Service can be viewed on ‘Watch Again’ until the end of Sunday 18th October. Visit the Obitus website <https://www.obitus.com/> and enter username: Qofo0194 Password: 865238

Donations in memory of Ann to
The Salisbury Hospice Charity or The Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance
may be sent to
A H Cheater Funerals Directors
122 The Hundred
Romsey
SO51 8BY

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

Three days before we were due to fly to South Africa in January, news started circulating of an explosion of coronavirus cases in Wuhan, China. Three days after we arrived, it was revealed that two patients in the UK had tested positive for Covid-19. Where were they from? China!

Seven days later a third patient tested positive. By the time we returned on 16th February, the Health Secretary was issuing new regulations allowing doctors to forcibly quarantine people for their own safety.

And from there, the rest, as some may say is history. Well, it is not! Four months later we are beginning to see restrictions on lockdown, announced on 23rd March being eased but the spectre of continued risk will continue for weeks, months or even years?

So, what is meant by the term ‘sane’? My dictionary states “*Sound in mind, not deranged; sensible, reasonable (of views); healthy, sound physically*”.

Some reading this may argue against but I feel I satisfy the above! So how to maintain that level of sanity.

Keep the mind active is an oft repeated mantra and so to achieve this part I dug out a puzzle which had been unopened for the past ten years. With 1000 pieces it depicts a variety of major passenger ships from past and present times.

Also untouched for the past three years was a die-cast model of my MG. Not being a maker of models, I found this much harder. Primarily to summon the courage to start the process of cleaning up the model pieces. The tidying process was delayed whilst waiting for a modelling kit of tools to arrive.



From China!!! Once done I found that finding paint was a logistic problem, mainly due to increased demand and being unsure what sort of paint, I actually needed. Assistance from a Facebook colleague was a great help. However, the model remains in a box, prepared but unpainted.



Before the lockdown, there was a news item about transcribing UK rainfall records which sounded interesting, if not a little repetitive. A way to payback my long service award from the Met Office of a barograph. I found the *Zooniverse* website and found

the data and instructions and started transcribing. I think I started in about 1946, then worked back through 1932, 1924. My next visit I found I was in 1886, such had been the interest and take-up. However, I looked a little further and found a number of other interesting data capture sites. I enrolled to count African animals from remote cameras in the Karoo, South Africa, and a site for counting penguins in the South Sandwich Islands, Antarctica. I am still involved.

A week or so before the lockdown of 23rd March we were looking after daughter Melissa who was recovering from an operation to her foot. We had started cake making before the lockdown and have continued on a regular basis throughout. Fruit cake, mandarin cake, lemon drizzle, banana loaf, Victoria sponge, date and walnut, scones have all been made. We are lucky in having a supplier in our son who is able to get flour and other items. The cake making is quite relaxing and luckily, we did not have any failures!



I started looking for another puzzle and found a super one with a local flavour. It was from a painting in 1954 and shows a mainline express Merchant Navy Pacific locomotive 'United States Lines' hauling the Bournemouth Belle, flanked by a goods train and a local service heading towards the branch line to Ringwood. The scene is set just west of Brockenhurst Station.

And so, to health. We have resisted the pull to go outside and exercise apart from walks to the local shop and daughter to collect, swap goods, all at an appropriate distance. However, I have a static bike in my office and have managed, for the most part, to 'cycle' 5km every morning which has kept the legs going if nothing else.

On the announcement from the Prime Minister, I also declared a stop on drinking and apart from a celebratory drink on VE Day, have not touched a drop since 23rd March, and still going strong.

Of course, there has been plenty of reading, loads of time to continue with family history, researching subjects on the internet and at the time of writing this I feel I have managed to 'keep sane' throughout this pandemic. Towards the end of May, golf was a sport allowed to resume, subject to various measures and I have been playing each week since.

On the day that I submit this to the 'judges', the horse has bolted and Boris has decided to make a decisive announcement and say that facemasks must be used in shops, in eleven days' time!!! You cannot make this stuff up. Keep well everybody.

Robin Plumley



Easily forgotten

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 760 August 14th 2020

"Seafarers at the core of shipping's future" might seem somewhat an obvious observation – a bit like suggesting that the sea is a necessary adjunct to the flotation of ships. It is, in case it has escaped your notice, the IMO's "World Maritime Theme" for 2021, and it is clear, bearing in mind the world's treatment of this important workforce in 2020, something that needs to be yelled from the rooftops.

IMO would like its annual campaign to increase the visibility of seafarers, which is harder than it seems, as few among our populations, preoccupied with their Covid concerns, would ever think about them. But it is worth considering that unlike all those millions of folk who have been largely idle since the pandemic struck, or cheerfully WFH, it's the seafarers who have stopped the world starving, and prevented your lights going out.

Well, you might say that's their job, like the dustmen and supermarket delivery drivers and postmen and farmers who never ceased their activities even during lockdown. But what nobody seems to appreciate, is that unlike all those other heroes of the pandemic, the seafarers never stopped at the end of their shifts, keeping on working well beyond the end of their long contracts, because there was no relief for them.

In ports around the world, officials whose job was to say "no", denied these invisible workers their right to shore leave, making it clear that they were to stay aboard their ships, and that there was no possibility of a crew change. There were endless excuses – there were no hotels available in which waiting crew might be quarantined before their ships arrived, or until an aircraft might take them home. It was always someone else's problem and the easiest thing to tell the master that he had to push on to the next port, where help might be available. Everyone knew that it probably wouldn't be.

Listening to someone waxing lyrically on the radio today on the human rights of refugees and illegal asylum seekers, I thought that some emphasis on the human rights of seafarers might be nice. It would be interesting to see some sort of legal challenge, on behalf of seafarers, focussing on the denial of rights to which others are accustomed. Rights to a family life, perhaps, or in the case of months on end without setting foot on land might be considered "cruel and unusual punishment". There have been ports where seafarers wanting urgent medical or dental treatment have had this denied. There have been other places where positively vituperative campaigns have been stirred up by the local media, suggesting that the ships coming into their ports, bringing the goods they could not do without, and in which their exports will be carried, will be laden with disease.


The industry's institutions and fair minded employers have done their utmost to raise the plight of these essential workers with governments and there have indeed been successes in repatriating crew who have been at sea for ridiculous lengths of time, often well beyond legal limits. There are some nations which have been prepared to categorise seafarers as the "essential workers" which they are, some ports and governments which have gone that extra mile.

One of the real consequences of this invisibility of the seafaring workforce is the complete inability to even imagine what life is like aboard ship, under this appalling regime. The ships, and their goods, keep coming, but no landsman ever has a clue what goes on the other side of the dock wall. Outside the specialised cruise ship sector with their considerable shipboard populations, the individual ship's complements are too small to make any waves.

What a miserable life to contemplate, one of apparently endless work, as the voyage goes on, and on, with no prospect of it terminating. No chance of a brief visit to the shops, with the ship in port, no possibility of getting beyond the end of the gangway. Think of a forty day voyage at "economical" speed in your steel box, and only being able to smell the land or glimpse a tree from the top of the superstructure, when your ship finally berths. What is there to recommend in such a life?

And think on those thousands of seafarers who are on leave, but financially unsupported and unable to join the ships they need to earn the money to feed their families. Shipping companies, agencies, all jumping through bureaucratic hoops as they try and negotiate the changing regulatory minefield. There are quite extraordinary journeys criss-crossing the earth, as seafarers make their journeys home, or attempt to get to work. Most, invariably with little logic, will involve weeks in quarantine.

You might suggest that this pandemic is a one-off and desperate times need appropriate measures, but it is the failure to even recognise the needs of this essential workforce that sticks in the craw. Maybe we can expect nothing better, if you look back to the way that merchant seafarers have been treated over the years, in both war and peace. Essential workers they might be, but very easily forgotten.

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and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk

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Many readers will be familiar with gCaptain, a daily online bulletin, and another is Splash247, a less US-centric site with enough content to keep you content through what looks like being a long winter.

In an article published on 14 September, their correspondent Andrew Craig -Bennett suggested a solution to the crew change problem which Michael Grey described as "A fine article...about the only other meaningful contribution I have seen was from the ITF which suggested that seafarers should just down tools, but I doubt that this will happen." Sam Chambers, the editor of Splash has kindly allowed me to print the header and first paragraph, with a link to the full article on their site:

A practical way to deal with the shameful maltreatment of 600,000 people

Andrew Craig-Bennett September 14, 2020

We can't go on like this. We all know it. The frequency of silly little accidents that pop up in near miss reports and such like has increased, is increasing, it ought to be diminished and now we are seeing spectacular big accidents as well, all with the same cause – people at sea have been there too long; stress, boredom and fatigue amongst crew members are affecting ship operations everywhere. *To read on, click [Splash247](#)*



New Members

Timothy Cummins is a Harbour Pilot and Assistant Harbour Master at Portsmouth.

Mike Leonard Savaria is a Southampton Pilot.

(Apologies for the lack of any further information but I do not have access to the office files at present.)

Piloting in a Pandemic – the New Normal

Captain William Hargreaves FNI, Southampton Pilot

A shortened version of this article appeared in the Pilot's column of the September '20 edition of "Seaways", the journal of the Nautical Institute.

A ship's pilot faces many challenges. Trying to explain to the bridge team why, at 2000 on a Thursday, along with all the other ships in the port, I was about to sound the ship's whistle was one of them. "Clapping for Carers and Key Workers" was a concept which I had difficulty in communicating to a foreign crew. But that has ended now, and like the rest of the world the mariner has had to adapt to living and working with coronavirus.

I've been piloting for over a quarter of a century and my routine at the start of a watch is pretty constant. I put my charged portable radio in my flotation coat, (fitted with an internal buoyancy aid and known colloquially as a "float coat"), and my charged iPad in my bag. Check the tides, weather, the predicted acts of pilotage and complete a passage plan for my first allocated vessel. Nowadays, I have to add a couple of things to the list: refresh the supply of surgical masks I carry with me and remember to put my hand sanitiser in my pocket. As lockdown has started to ease there is more traffic and a few more cars in the carpark, so I'm having to allow a little more time to get into work. But most people are still working from home. The VTS Control Room is still out of bounds to casual visits, so the only person I'm likely to see in the office is the receptionist – behind a Perspex screen of course.

We have gone back to using taxis: more Perspex. most of the taxis are now fitted with a clear plastic screen behind the front seats. I'd like to say it's akin to riding in the back of an American police car, but that might be incriminating myself. For three months we used dedicated drivers to hopefully minimise the risk of infection, so only now are we beginning to see the old regular taxi drivers. One of them asked me if it was good to get back to work. I didn't understand. Because he hadn't picked up any pilots for three months, he thought we'd all been furloughed. I didn't like to ask him how he thought the fuel in his vehicle or the food on his table had arrived in the country. Pandemic or no pandemic, and despite many campaigns to raise the profile of shipping and seafarers, there are still people who seem to be blind to the activities of the port and shipping in general.

There's no doubt that at the height of lockdown trade was down. One of the advantages to piloting in Southampton is the variety of different types of ships: tankers, containerships, car carriers and passenger vessels are the majority of our visitors but there's also a sprinkling of bulk carriers and specialist ships such as research vessels and the occasional military vessel. Usually when trade drops in one sector it will hold up in others. Coronavirus, as we are all too aware, has affected all sectors. There's been little demand for aviation fuel petrol so the refinery's need for crude oil and overall shipping movements have dropped. Most businesses were shut so the demand for the cargoes that are carried on car carriers was severely reduced. (Although generally referred to as car carriers, most of this type of vessel is more correctly described as PCTC – Pure Car and Truck Carriers. They can carry anything fitted with wheels or tracks. And, if it doesn't have wheels they can still carry it on special trailers). There was a small reduction in the number of containerships – most are on scheduled services. Of course, the virus has had the biggest impact on the cruise sector.



Full of cruise ships



An empty quay greets the arrival of the QM2

It might be expected that with no passengers to carry there would be no passenger ships visiting the port. This couldn't be further from the truth. Those that are anchored on the south coast of England make regular visits to change personal and take on stores and bunkers. They also need to leave the anchorage so that they can discharge their grey water on passage. But there are no passengers and much reduced crews. It seems a little surreal to report to VTS that the Queen Mary 2 has only 135 on board- and a number of those are only on board because they can't get home. It seems even more surreal to look down on the wharf as we berth the ship. In normal times this will be bustling with personnel and forklift trucks as they ready themselves to unload the baggage of the departing passengers. It's sad to see an empty jetty with just a few linesmen to take the ship's ropes.

Whilst berthing passenger vessels, I'd also got used to cheery crewmembers waving to me from passenger balconies. To minimise the potential spread of infection most of the crew on passenger vessels were moved to the empty crew cabins, while the companies arranged their repatriation. I never ceased to be amazed at the optimism of the average seafarer. Crewmembers who might ordinarily contract for four months have been onboard for eight months, sometimes longer. Often, because the ship wants to maintain it's own bubble, i.e. social-isolation, without shore leave. We've clapped for key workers but I always clapped for the unsung heroes on ships trading around the world.

Just like the response of each and every individual nation, it seems that every ship is dealing with the impact of coronavirus differently. It is at the very least ironic



Boarding a passenger ship

that passenger vessels, which for years have dealt effectively and efficiently with infections onboard, are now being hardest hit by lockdown. In my experience, and without exception, during this pandemic passenger vessels have developed a rigorous procedure for boarding. Masks and gloves are worn, my temperature is taken and I fill out a questionnaire about my well-being and contact with possible coronavirus sufferers. One cruise ship company also required that I wore a sterile overall. As I walked to the bridge I felt a little bit like royalty. Instead of petals being strewn at my feet, I had a person following me with a sanitising mist dispenser, erasing all evidence of my passing. (Actually, there was one exception. Having been told the lifts were unavailable to me because they'd been "deep cleaned" I climbed ten flights of stairs, had my temperature taken before entering the wheelhouse and was told it was okay but a little high. If I hadn't been so out of breathe I might have passed comment!)



Full PPE



Dressing down

Other ships have differing standards. The majority of ship's crews wear facemasks, some occasionally gloves as well. Though I'm not sure I fully understand the logic of the crew wearing full PPE as shown in the photograph. I noted that even the crew going to mooring stations were similarly attired. Nowadays, ship's crews are living in their own bubble. Most communications are done electronically. One Captain told me they's just completed a ship's audit via Zoom and email. The only outsider they see in the flesh is a pilot. Another Captain apologised that he was wearing a boilersuit. A very neat and clean boilersuit but not his uniform. He told me that because he never sees any port officials these days he'd got into the habit of dressing down.

It is therefore understandable that I've noted a regular fascination with my float coat, and the requirement on some vessels to quarantine it. It's the one item of my clothing which brushes against everything and which is not regularly washed, (If it got too wet it might self-inflate). (When I get home from work it's straight into the shower

and ALL my clothing into the wash). On one passenger vessel they bagged it at the boarding position and returned it to me on departure. It is quite common for an officer to point to the top of a locker or table and tell me that is where I can put my coat and bag, the area will be disinfected on my departure. Less common is to be told I should only touch one particular VHF radio handset.

At the beginning of lockdown, I regretted the passing of two noble traditions: the firm handshake with the Captain at the beginning and end of an act of pilotage, and the offer of a cup of coffee. The handshake has not returned, (will it ever in a post-Covid world?) I occasionally exchange elbow nudges but most of the time it's still a friendly wave. But I'm pleased to report that coffee is back on the menu – even the occasional meal. Despite the requirement on most vessels to wear a facemask, the concept of social distancing has been accepted by all. So, provided I'm at a suitable distance, I can drink and eat in comfort.

If the Captain is also drinking his or her coffee and he has removed their own facemask we can have a normal conversation, albeit at a distance. With a mask, something is lost. You can't see all the person's facial expressions, and communications are degraded. Though I did notice the Captain's eye's roll when I made a fatuous joke about the name of his ship: "Glovis Corona". He'd obviously heard it all before.



The Modern "Mayflower"

On September 15th. 2020 - the Mayflower Autonomous Ship (MAS) was launched into Plymouth Sound to prepare for a pioneering transatlantic crossing; the first unmanned crossing powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and solar energy.

Built in an industrial park overlooking Plymouth, the craft is a steel trimaran -15 metres in length- and, all being well it will complete the 3,220 mile voyage in a much faster time than the original "Mayflower" crossing in 1620 which lasted some ten weeks, with a crew of more than 130, five of whom died.

The consortium of companies behind the project, is led by PROMARE, a marine research organisation and includes IBM, Msubs (a Plymouth based submarine manufacturer) and Marine AI. With financial backing from Rolls-Royce, Honeywell, ABB and Wartsila one forecast suggests that the autonomous ships market could be worth over £100bn in ten years time.

The President of Msubs - the driving force behind the project - is quoted as saying "Doing this on a ship is infinitely easier than in a car" and, in principle, autonomous technology is better suited to maritime transport than road or air. With lower speeds, less risk of collisions on the open ocean and detailed mapping of hazards like reefs and rocks available, the enthusiasts believe robot ships will reshape the industry with, initially, small freight barges, robot icebreakers, tugs, trawlers and scientific research vessels entering the picture - to mention but a few.

Jonathan Batty of IBM suggests that Covid-19 has been a research "accelerant" and he points out that it not just the cruising industry that has suffered from the pandemic with research vessels, cargo vessels and fishing vessels all grappling with the threat to crews - a threat to which autonomous technology offers a solution.

For many years, scientists have been using "subsea gliders" -torpedo shaped autonomous vehicles - to collect samples and conduct oceanographic or meteorological research and with the machines becoming more powerful - and cheaper - they are able to travel into the open ocean for 60 days at a time before returning.

An Allianz report in 2018 said that 75% of shipping insurance losses annually - worth some USD 1.6 billion -were caused by human error, including tired or distracted crews. On conventional vessels living accommodation, sanitary and cooking facilities etc. take up space and use energy - not so with autonomous vessels. Air pollution is a major concern today but the deployment of autonomous barges to carry coastal freight around the UK would reduce the huge number of polluting diesel trucks on roads and motorways. Canals and inland waterways could enjoy greater usage with freight vessels equipped with drones for last-mile deliveries.

Currently, Amsterdam is developing autonomous boats to ferry people - and to collect rubbish - while unmanned electric barges carrying freight are being developed to exploit the Low Countries extensive canal system. Norway and Finland currently use autonomous passenger ferries.

In 2016, the US navy deployed its first autonomous warship -the 40 ft. Sea Hunter -which can patrol for months without a crew and in June of this year (2020) the Royal Navy tested its first unmanned Pacific 24 craft, created by BAE Systems. With a speed of approximately 40 knots and armed with machine guns it could be used to deter smugglers etc.

All recognise that outdated maritime law will have to be drastically changed to accommodate the introduction of autonomy and this is already under way with IMO examining the issues and some national Governments including Norway and Holland drafting new rules to accommodate innovation.

Plymouth Marine Laboratory has established a 1,000 sq. km. testing ground termed "Smart Sound" for further research into maritime autonomy and, with growing interest globally this could be a lucrative development.

CRK 9/20. With acknowledgements : Robin Pagamenta in Plymouth and "Sunday Telegraph"



Gone Aloft

Edward A Hunter

Eddie Hunter, who Went Aloft on the 24th September at the Mountbatten Hospice, aged 89, was a retired Electrical Superintendent with British Rail Ferries, later Sealink. A Belfast man, he served an electrical apprenticeship with Harland & Wolff and worked later for Cammell Laird before going to sea for a while.

Ashore, he worked for Birds-Eye before taking up the post of Electrical Superintendent with British Rail Ferries, based at Harwich.

After Eddie's wife Dorothy passed away he met and married José, a Dutch lady who was also a widow. After his retirement they moved to Southampton to be near José's disabled daughter who sadly died suddenly earlier this year.

A very kind and sociable man, Eddie would visit the club room regularly up until the lock-down but found it increasingly difficult to converse.

He died of the lung disease Mesothelioma which is related to asbestos exposure.

Our condolences go to José and his children and step-daughter.

A final dredging

by Eddie Hunter

Eddie was a fine wordsmith and wrote many gentle and amusing tales about his working life. He called them “**Dredgings from the fast-failing memory of an Electrical Superintendent**” and they were published in the Seven Seas Club Magazine in 2005 and 2006. They were also reprinted here in 2010 to 2012. His “**A Shipyard Apprenticeship**” was also printed here in four parts from Dec '18 to Sept '19.

Eddie was surprised and delighted when he learned that some of the ladies of the Seven Seas Club read and enjoyed his humble efforts and he wrote the following specially for them. He knew just how to ‘wring their withers’. It has not been printed here before.

Eddie wrote:

What can I write specially for the Ladies?

Ah, I know, I'll tell you about the Cub Pack in the hospital, about teaching the reef knot, 'hot sausages,' and little James, plus a bit about my Father, the art critic, and the drawing of a spotted elephant with two trunks, one at each end, and only three legs. So, before you continue, d'u have a box of tissues handy?

As usual, this Dredging needs a title and the background, so here goes:

a Elephant

Belfast, November, 1949

Belfast at that time, was a dismal dump like any other post-war British industrial conurbation. It consisted mainly of close-packed, smoke-blackened and often damp small terraced houses, the two up two down variety, built to serve the dark spinning mills and the dreary weaving factories of the linen industry, the huge Belfast rope works, Gallagher's monstrous cigarette factory, the vast shipyard of course, and any other stray industry that I may have forgotten.

For some inexplicable reason, I loved the place, even though unhappy about the sectarian divide that was always there, impossible to ignore. And it seemed to rain most of the time.

But as a child, I was rather more fortunate than most other wee Belfast diddlers -my family, mother, father and sisters Mary and Mildred, lived in West Belfast, on the new McGibbon estate, a large sprawl of two up two down terraced houses which had front gardens of varying length depending upon the location and the diverging geometry of the streets. It was one of the (slightly) better places to live, close to open country and the mountains and Cave Hill.

McGibbon's estate was in the Ardoyne area, later infamous - had I continued to live there during the 1970s, 80s and 90s, I doubt I would consider myself so fortunate! I used to claim that I had an uncle who was a rear gunner on a milk float. It was a lie, of course, told only for comic effect. He actually manned the forward firing machine gun.

But back to the account of 'a Elephant.'

The working population lived mainly in those older damp over-crowded terraced houses, where many people fell prey to the virulent diseases of the day, tuberculosis being prominent among them, while Penicillin and the other wonder drugs were as yet largely unknown.

Small wonder then that there was a TB sanatorium on the shores of Lough Neagh, at Green Island near where one campus of the Ulster University now stands.

Now, to this day, Irish ladies of both pre-dominant religions and none, will often express tender sympathy with moist eyes and the heartfelt words, "Ach, sure, God love him."

Or "her" as the case may be, the expression being adaptable and widely used.

So Ladies, prepare to join your Irish sisters. You won't be saying, " Ach, God love him," about me, but don't be surprised if you shed a tear.

I think I mentioned elsewhere, and, if I haven't, I should have mentioned that I was a devout member of the Boy Scout Movement in those far-off days — indeed I stayed an active member for much of my life.

A lady called Peggy Pollock, whose illustrious father we will meet later, ran a Cub Pack, the 25th Belfast (YMCA.) She had an Assistant Leader called Maureen. Both being refined, genteel and ladylike, they decided that they needed somebody in the Pack who could indulge in rough and tumble with the boys. So Peggy approached me. I was flattered to be asked and readily accepted.

And when I saw the gentle Maureen at my first Pack meeting, well, I became instantly, helplessly, hopelessly infatuated! Helplessly because she was simply beautiful and graceful. Hopelessly because an expensive diamond ring adorned one significant finger. She was engaged to be married to a bank cashier, called Alan - not the last member of that profession who was to interfere in my love life! But that comes later, in a further Dredging.

Maureen was also Leader of her own Cub Pack, in a children's hospital on the outskirts of the city. Summer and winter the windows were always open. And, come autumn's winds or winter's gales, the children slept out on open verandas. When I went

there, I was always as cold as a cod in a bucket of ice.

It was a TB hospital, and the Boys' Ward contained thirty or so long - stay patients, many of whom, indeed most of whom, had been there since they were about two years old.

All were permanently bed bound - and never a bed sore, such was the skill and the dedication of the nurses.

Most of the children had to be spoon fed, but there was no malnutrition. The only outings were around the hospital grounds, weather permitting.

Special teachers did their best to educate the children, but the results were limited, yet, even in there, the children knew who were Catholics and who were Protestants.

In those pre-television times, the highlight of the day was Children's Hour on the BBC Home Service. Uncle Mac, Larry the Lamb, Dennis the Dachshund, Mister Mayor, Sir, and Mister Earnest, the Policeman, even Mister Grouser, were all personal friends, along with Cicely Courtenage, Romany, as in "Out with," and Henry Bones, the Boy Detective.

The highlight of the week was the Cub Pack Meeting at 2:30 every Saturday afternoon.

Cub training was very difficult, but Maureen managed wonderfully well and the boys were fiercely proud of their progress.

I don't know how on earth I found the time, but I was soon Maureen's Assistant, and wracking my brain to invent interesting games and write serial stories for bed-bound children.

One afternoon, Maureen asked me to teach some of the boys to tie knots, at which I considered myself something of an expert.

Yes. At the time, I could tie eighty-eight different knots and could bore for Britain on the subject, until one evening after dinner my Father gave me a heavy parcel in coarse brown paper tied with string.

"Little present for you, Ed."

"Thanks, Dad. What is it?"

The tired grey blue eyes twinkled. "Well, open it and find out."

I carefully untied the string, as befitted an expert in knots.

"Save the paper," Mother said.

I removed the paper, revealing a thick, heavy hard-backed book. The title was, "Knots, Splices and Fancy Work." And it contained exactly eight hundred and eighty eight knots. I was speechless, lost for words.

Dad smiled in mischievous satisfaction. "Thought that would keep you quiet for a while."

But, clearly, I didn't learn, for it was shortly after that I made the sweeping pronouncement, "You can learn anything from books."

"Eddie, you can't swim, can you?" My sister Mary put in. "Do you think you could learn that from a book?"

Embarrassed, but unwilling to back down, I mumbled something to the effect that it must be possible.

"Good. Why don't you, then?" Said Mary.

Several weeks went by, and I had practically forgotten about the incident when, one evening, Mary revisited the topic. "Ed, how's the swimming coming along?"

"Er, well," I temporised, my face reddening. "I have been rather busy . . ."

"What's wrong?" Dad asked, his grey eyes atwinkle. "Couldn't you find a waterproof book?"

But, back to teaching the Cubs in the hospital. The obvious knot with which to begin was the reef knot. So I went from bed to bed, under the watchful eyes of the ever present nurses, devising different ways to tie a reef knot until each boy could do it for himself, at which point I would say, "You've got it. Very good. You're a hot sausage!"

Try as he would, one little boy, James, just couldn't get it. Each time he failed I would pull a funny face at him, shake my head in mock sadness and say, "No, that's not it. I'm afraid you're not a hot sausage yet." Eventually I had give up to move on to the next bed.

At the end of the session the ward was full of 'hot sausages,' some of whom could even tie the sheet bend as well as the reef knot. Poor James was the only one with whom I failed. I was about to return to him when Maureen announced story time.

While I was reading from Kuyper's Jungle Book, with different voices for each animal character, I noticed that James was still trying to manage the reef knot with help from a nurse. Presently, glancing up from the book, I saw a big beaming smile on his face and a happy smile on the face of the nurse.

When I closed the Jungle Book, to the usual chorus of groans and protests, I made my way back to James who was ecstatic with delight. "I . . . I . . . I can tie the reef knot now"

I shook my head. "No you can't. I don't believe it."

"Yes I can."

"Show me. I bet you can't."

James grinned, knowing he was being teased. The tongue came out and was bitten gently to aid concentration as the small hands moved carefully to produce the reef knot.

"Yes, you've got it. That's a reef knot." I untied the ropes and handed them to him.

"Tell you what, bet you can't do it again."

The tongue came out again and the little face frowned with the effort until, smiling in triumph, James presented me with a second reef knot.

"Again," I demanded, praying he wouldn't muff it, instantly regretting my cruelty.

But He was obviously listening and watching. The little figure lying flat in the hospital cot slowly, carefully, painfully, tied the knot again. ("Ach, God love him," anybody?)

He looked up at me expectantly. I nodded down at him.. "That's very good, James. Very well done."

I ruffled his hair and was about to turn away. He caught my arm to stop me. I leaned down towards him.

He said, "Am I . . . am I a hot sausage, now?"

I struggled with my sudden tears and fought with a choking lump in my throat, but I managed to croak, "Yes, James, you are a hot sausage now."

"Look up, look up" I thought. But I'm not ashamed to say that looking up didn't work as it's supposed to. And, through my welling tears, I saw that it didn't work for the nurse either. Fortunately James was oblivious as he clutched his precious reef knot and held it where he could see it.

And ever since that day, I have been very careful to respect all children and to treat them very even-handedly.

Which brings me to, yes, that's it - a Elephant. The spelling is correct, even though the grammar is wrong. But who cares?

I helped Maureen with that Cub Pack, hail, rain or shine, for nearly three years until, eventually, my wider career claimed me and I had to leave to go to sea.

As a going-away present, the children gave me a scrapbook containing drawings they had done of animals from the Jungle Book. I carried that scrapbook around with me from place to place, home to home - I think I have it still, but I'm not sure. It may have got lost in one or other of my numerous moves as my career took me from town to town throughout the years.

Anyway. I took it home when the children had given it to me. The book was already in a sorry condition from their handling while putting it together.

"What's that?" Mother asked.

"The Cubs in the hospital gave it to me. My farewell present."

Mother carried the book to a table near the window. She smiled as she turned the pages.

Father levered himself painfully out of his wooden armchair by the fire. Squinting through the smoke from his fortieth Woodbine of the day, he studied the drawings as Mother slowly turned the pages, and read the laboriously printed captions. At "a Elephant" they paused for a closer look. My father particularly liked elephants, used to feed them buns in Belfast Zoo, until one day a large bull elephant snatched his flat cap from his head and ate it. Father was careful to keep a safe distance away from his precious elephants thereafter.

"Peculiar looking elephant," he grumbled. "Why's it got spots? And where's its fourth leg?"

It was unusual for him to be so grumpy. I thought of the hot sausage, and all the effort I knew he had invested in that drawing while Maureen tried to hold a sketch pad steady above him.

"Dad," I said, "The little fellow who drew that picture is nearly ten. He has been in that hospital, flat on his back, since he was a baby. He has never seen a car, never seen a tram or a bus. He saw a Dalmatian pup once, when Maureen held it up high enough for him to see."

Father blew a plume of smoke towards the ceiling and removed a shred of tobacco from his lip. Then he looked down at the drawing and nodded as he tapped the paper with a finger. He said, "Best damn elephant I ever saw."

Ach, God love him, for his eyes were moist. And not from cigarette smoke.



With this month's Trafalgar Dinner being the latest casualty in this world-wide war against Covid-19, this updated version of a well circulated piece from the internet might bring a knowing, but fleeting, smile of recognition to the lips.

BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR 2020

Nelson: "Order the signal, Hardy."

Hardy: "Aye, aye sir."

Nelson: "Hold on, this isn't what I dictated to Flagg. What's the meaning of this?"

Hardy: "Sorry sir?"

Nelson (reading aloud): "England expects every person to do his or her duty, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religious persuasion or disability." - What gobbledegook is this for God's sake?"

Hardy: "Admiralty policy, I'm afraid, sir. We're an equal opportunities employer now. We had the devil's own job getting "England" past the censors, lest it be considered racist."

Nelson: "Gadzooks, Hardy. Hand me my pipe and tobacco."

Hardy: "Sorry sir. All naval vessels have now been designated smoke-free working environments."

Nelson: "In that case, break open the rum ration. Let us splice the main brace to steel the men before battle."

Hardy: "The rum ration has been abolished, Admiral. It's part of the Government's policy on binge drinking."

Nelson: "Good heavens, Hardy. I suppose we'd better get on with it full speed ahead."

Hardy: "I think you'll find that there's a 4 knot speed limit in this stretch of water."

Nelson: "Damn it man! We are on the eve of the greatest sea battle in history. We must advance with all dispatch. Report from the crow's nest, please."

Hardy: "That won't be possible, sir."

Nelson: "What?"

Hardy: "Health and Safety have closed the crow's nest, sir. No harness; and they said that rope ladders don't meet regulations. They won't let anyone up there until proper scaffolding can be erected."

Nelson: "Then get me the ship's carpenter without delay, Hardy."

Hardy: "He's busy knocking up a wheelchair access to the foredeck Admiral."

Nelson: "Wheelchair access? I've never heard anything so absurd."

Hardy: "Health and safety again, sir. We have to provide a barrier-free environment for the differently abled."

Nelson: "Differently abled? I've only one arm and one eye and I refuse even to hear mention of the word. I didn't rise to the rank of admiral by playing the disability card."

Hardy: "Actually, sir, you did. The Royal Navy is under-represented in the areas of visual impairment and limb deficiency."

Nelson: "Whatever next? Give me full sail. The salt spray beckons."

Hardy: "A couple of problems there too, sir. Health and safety won't let the crew up the rigging without hard hats. And they don't want anyone breathing in too much salt - haven't you seen the adverts?"

Nelson: "I've never heard such infamy. Break out the cannon and tell the men to stand by to engage the enemy."

Hardy: "The men are a bit worried about shooting at anyone, Admiral."

Nelson: "What? This is mutiny!"

Hardy: "It's not that, sir. It's just that they're afraid of being charged with murder if they actually kill anyone. There are a couple of legal-aid lawyers on board, watching everyone like hawks."

Nelson: "Then how are we to sink the Frenchies and the Spanish?"

Hardy: "Actually, sir, we're not."

Nelson: "We're not?"

Hardy: "No, sir. The French and the Spanish are our European partners now. According to the Common Fisheries Policy, we shouldn't even be in this stretch of water. We could get hit with a claim for compensation."

Nelson: "But you must hate a Frenchman as you hate the devil."

Hardy: "I wouldn't let the ship's diversity coordinator hear you saying that sir. You'll be up on disciplinary report."

Nelson: "You must consider every man an enemy, who speaks ill of your King."

Hardy: "Not any more, sir. We must be inclusive in this multicultural age. Now put on your Kevlar vest; it's the rules. It could save your life"

Nelson: "Don't tell me - Health and Safety. Whatever happened to rum, sodomy and the lash?"

Hardy: "As I explained, sir, rum is off the menu! And there's a ban on corporal punishment."

Nelson: "What about sodomy?"

Hardy: "I believe that is now legal, sir."

Nelson: "In that case..... Kiss me, Hardy."

Building locally - hearts or heads

Baird Maritime Workboat World, Grey Power, October 2020

It is an argument that has reverberated around both the UK (where this is being written) and Australia. It is one that sets ideas of national self-sufficiency against the need for the taxpayer's money to be spent wisely. And in our maritime world, it seems to give rise to very strong feelings, notably when grey-painted ships are needed by governments.

As regards actual ships with guns and missiles aboard them, there is less of an argument, just as long as a country has the capability of constructing warships in its shipyards. A self-respecting nation, it might be suggested, ought to have the capability of defending itself and it is a bold government that will argue for major warships to be built abroad, if that means local shipyards will be denied work and end up in trouble. If the country's shipbuilding capabilities do not permit this, then there is no choice other than ordering from somewhere with such capability. It is why you have defence export markets.

But what about naval auxiliaries, which are basically merchant ships painted grey with a lot of defence-related gear aboard? Or other vessels that are run by agencies supported by governments which means that taxpayers are inextricably involved? Should these ships be put out to worldwide tender and ordered from wherever the best deal is to be found? Or should the strategic needs of the country, in terms of the maintenance of a capable maritime design and construction sector, be weighed into the decision making? And in the event that the contracts are restricted to local designers and builders, isn't this just economic nationalism – a form of unashamed protectionism, which ought to be deplored?

None of these questions lend themselves to easy answers, with the people who have to make these decisions battered to and fro by public opinion, political lobbying and the current needs of the nation for local employment and the maintenance of a struggling sector. You can see all of these concerns reverberating around the UK, as its government considers the requirement for a new generation of Royal Fleet Auxiliary solid support ships, needed, among other duties, to maintain support for the RN's two aircraft carriers once they are fully up and running.

With the UK exiting from the European Union, which previously required such vessels to be put out to international tender, the decision as to where these ships are to be built has become one for Westminster alone. The RFA has recently taken delivery of a series of South Korean built oilers for the fleet and there is no doubt that there are suitable designs available in both Europe and elsewhere. A "hybrid" solution, in which the hulls of the ships are built in some yard accustomed to merchant ship building, with the vessels fitted out in the UK has been suggested by some as a means of lowering costs. After all, merchant vessels of this size have not been constructed in any British shipyard for many years.

The "interim" Canadian solution, in which the national need for an auxiliary ship in a hurry was solved by converting a low-mileage container ship also attracted attention, encouraged by the sheer number of medium-sized container ships available on the market at bargain prices.

But the pressure to build the ships in the UK remains high, perhaps increasingly so since the economic consequences of the pandemic became more obvious. The amount of employment generated in such a "shovel-ready" enterprise would be substantial. But can they be constructed in a country which effectively shut the door on non-warship construction several decades ago? To answer these doubts, it might be pointed out that exactly the same apprehensions were voiced over the construction of the two aircraft carriers, by far the biggest and most sophisticated ships even contemplated for the RN. Modular construction and clever logistics made the building of these huge ships possible and it has been suggested that exactly the same principle could be repeated for the RFA's, spreading the benison of employment around the country, with distinct practical and political advantages.

But isn't this just doing the taxpayer a disservice in the long run, if it is possible to get the ships faster and cheaper from some overseas shipbuilder? It is worth pointing out that ship construction on the far side of the world it is not always as smooth a process as it is sometimes claimed, with language, communications and time differences all being handicaps that need to be surmounted for the length of the contract. It is also notable that any contract involving the MoD will see constant changes to the specifications throughout the build, so that to actually construct the ships domestically might offer advantages that actually can translate into cost savings.

But at the end of the day, in such cases, there will be an inevitable conflict between heart and head, politics and economics. It is always difficult to pick the winner in such a contest, and this will be no exception.

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Gone Aloft

Captain Alec G W Miller

Peacefully, at home in Locksheath, on 5th September
(No further details available at this time)

Mrs Ann Morris

On 5th September
(See page 6)

Edward A Hunter

At Mountbatten Hospice on 24th September
(See page 11)

The CACHALOTS

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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.

The cut-off date for the next edition will be
23rd October 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 now been decided to resume the draws when we regain access to the Club room. The validity of each share will be extended to reflect the missing months, from March onwards.