

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 83 Printer Friendly Digital Edition December 2020

Captain's Log

Club news continues to be in short supply as COVID restrictions continue to prevent meetings and our usual seasonal gatherings. As I write, the end of the national lockdown approaches, but the tier system that will replace it means the fun police are still in charge. I never make predictions, especially about the future, but after the 5-day national party scheduled for 23-28 December I am expecting to hear in the New Year that further restrictions will be required, etc etc...

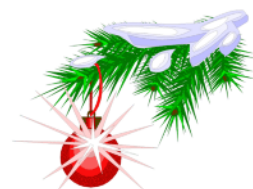
The good news is that scientists have replaced 'knights on white chargers' as the modern-day saviours of persons in distress, and they are coming to the rescue with vaccines. Perhaps at this time of year it ought to be wise men bringing vaccines instead of frankincense and myrrh (I'm happy for the gold to remain on the present list), but I had better stop the biblical parallels there before I get into trouble and can add thunderbolts to my list of woes.

Unable to go Christmas shopping, I have been doing some research on the internet. Apparently, the top 10 gifts for sailors are (in no particular order): sailing clothing; apres-sail attire; a chandlery gift card; books or videos; gadgets (sunglasses or watches apparently); kit bags; boat bits; RNLI membership; or, if you are feeling completely flush, a new suite of sails or even a new boat! The website I was perusing then had a link to the Top 10 Outboard engines to buy this Christmas. Stuff the turkey (we'll be doing that anyway), I'm hanging up an uber-large stocking this year in the hope of finding a brand-new Suzuki 6hp four-stroke outboard at the bottom of the bed on Christmas day. To be honest, there is one chance of that happening, and it is a fat one. My wife has never forgiven me for the socket set I gave her a couple of years ago and I suspect, like King John, I will have to make do with an India rubber ball or similar.

"*May you live in interesting times*", is attributed as being a Chinese curse, and 2020 has certainly been an *interesting* year. However, 2021 promises to be much brighter and we can all look forward to that. Whatever you are doing this Christmas, I hope it is most enjoyable.

Best wishes and stay safe.

Andrew Moll, Club Captain



From the Editor

Normally the subscription/250 Club renewal forms would go out with the December magazine but this year we will send out digital versions by email later in the month. Your Management Committee will be holding a virtual meeting on the 8th December when these and other matters will be discussed but it is not anticipated that there will be any changes so those of you who pay by SO need do nothing.

Virtual meetings have become very popular and you will find reports of our own Zoom meetings in the following pages.

The Solent Branch of the Nautical Institute is holding one such meeting, this time on 'GoToMeeting', **on Tuesday, 1st December at 1900**, to which you are all invited but you will have to be quick.

Cachalot Bill Hargreaves FNI, Southampton Pilot, will talk for about forty minutes giving an insight into "Piloting in the Pandemic" and expand upon his recent articles in *Seaways* and *The Cachalot*.

Click [HERE](https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/352567165) to join the meeting, or the full URL is <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/352567165>

It is new to me but, from what I can gather, if like me, your desktop does not have a camera and mic then you can just watch Bill's presentation without any further participation. Your identity will show up on his screen.

You can also dial in using your phone.

(For supported devices, tap a one-touch number below to join instantly.)

United Kingdom: +44 20 3713 5011

- One-touch: tel:+442037135011,,352567165#

Access Code: 352-567-165

No registration is required but I would recommend visiting the site a little earlier in order to download any necessary and to get yourself a comfortable seat.

Boatsteerer's Locker

Here we are again in our bunker for coronavirus lockdown and keeping our heads down.

What excitement we have all had with the US President's election and the possibility of a virus vaccine. The election puts ours for Club Captain as a mild affair although it would certainly create a lively Past Captain's meeting and AGM.

Trawling through the Club's 'linkedin' site which I haven't done for some months I came across one from Barry Peck at least 2 months old advising that Past Captain George Angas had major heart surgery. I immediately contacted George and apologised for my tardiness with my enquiry. He replied "I am recovering from open heart surgery which involved nine weeks in the Southampton General Hospital having a new aortic arch, a new aortic valve and a new mitral valve fitted. However I am glad to say I am still above ground and making a good recovery although I haven't started to play golf again just yet!"

He also advised that about two years ago he had a cataract removed from his right eye, after which they discovered that behind the cataract was an epiretinal membrane, which meant that a membrane had grown across his retina and was causing a distortion, the sight from his right eye is not very good, but the success rate for removing such membranes is only 20% so at the moment he is using stronger prescription glasses to cope with it. George surprised us all by appearing at a Friday Zoom meeting - well done George. John Noble keeps in regular contact with Past Captain Chris Phelan and gives a regular report at our Zoom meetings Chris was in the ICU at the General in the Autumn of 2018 for several weeks, but recovered -ish. There are some worrying developments and in October 2020 he had an operation to remove nearly three quarters of his liver following a cancer diagnosis and only partially successful nuclear isotope therapy. He is back home now and waiting to see how effective this treatment has been.

Past Captain Flemming Pedersen who himself is not in the best of health gave regular reports at the Zoom meetings on Cachalot Eddie Hunter who has now sadly gone aloft.

Past Captain Gerry Cartwright made an appearance on Zoom after his discharge from hospital and is still undergoing treatment.

Past Captain Ian Odd is very slowly getting back the use of his left arm but it will be a long process.

If you know of any Cachalot with ill health or having surgery please advise the Boatsteerer so he can follow up and not be hooting in thick foggy conditions.

On a more pleasant topic we have just been presented with our fourth great-grandchild and also, after much pleading, I have been persuaded to give a talk in the New Year on Zoom to the Dorset Branch of the World Ship Society. My subject will be British India's Gulf Service which Gordon Thornton is giving me much needed info. and assistance.

It will very soon be the Festive Season how much festivity will depend on the lurgie-lurgie.

Finally Richard, Liz and the Management Committee would like to take this opportunity to wish you all 'Merry Christmas and a Prosperous New Year' and don't get too turkified or inebriated.

"The company Pfizer which announced the vaccine against Covid-19, is the same company that created Viagra.

Therefore we can fully rely upon the announced vaccine, because if Pfizer was able to raise the dead they can more easily cure the living".

keep healthy, smiling, safe and sane
Ken D.



WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

Further to the mention above of the Dorset branch of the World Ship Society, they are very active online and on Zoom and their secretary, Steve Pink, extends a warm welcome to any Cachalots who would like to join their Zoom presentations. You can register with your email address and will then receive an invitation about a week before each event. In addition to Ken's BI talk their spring programme also includes one by Barry Peck on Cable ships. The next presentation, '17 cruises & a few ferries...with Bill Mayes', is at 1430 on Saturday 12th December.

Go to their website <https://www.shipsdorset.org/> for full information

Our First Cachalot Zoom Quiz!!!

To add to our now regular Friday virtual gatherings using Zoom, we decided to try something different to wile away the days! I was involved organising a quiz for our MG club in June and we have another planned for the day after our Cachalot one. Enough interest was forthcoming from the 'Friday crowd' so a quiz was planned for Tuesday 17 November. Initially we had eleven entries but for various reasons we ended up with seven. This did not deter our combatants from providing a fair and competitive go at the quiz. Three rounds of fifteen questions, all general knowledge, and a picture round of shipping house flags. What else could I compile?

The general knowledge questions were asked directly on the screen whilst the picture round was circulated by email just beforehand and by the Chat tool on Zoom. The Chat tool was used by participants to send me their scores at the end of each round.

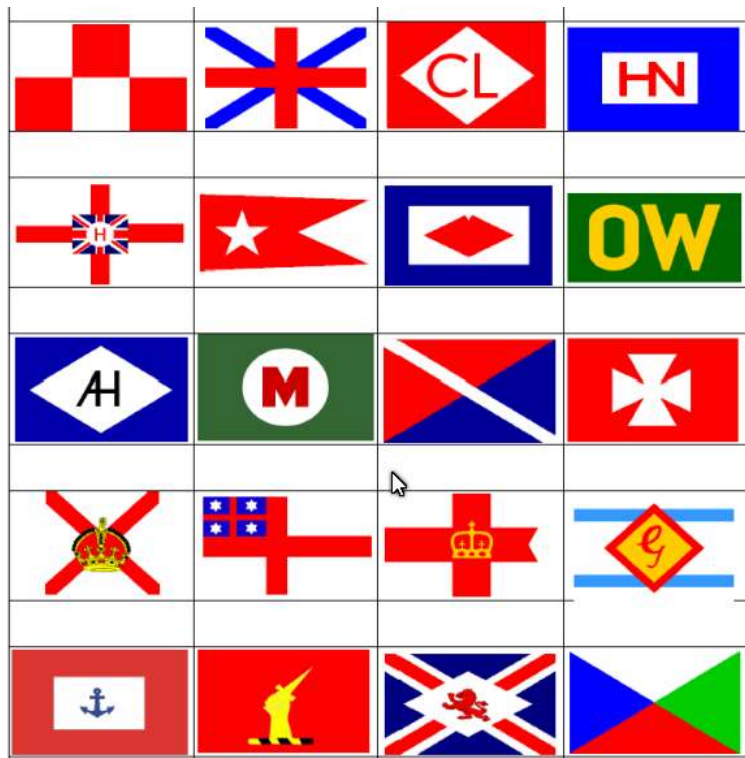
A total of seventy-one points were up for grabs with eventual scores in the range from fifty-one to sixteen. Two people came a very smart second with the same points of forty-six.

The winner was Martin Phipps who will receive a bottle of Monte Velho red wine from the Alentejo region of Portugal.

It seems this first attempt at a quiz went down well and maybe we can look at another one in a few months' time. I am happy to compile and compare, either using Zoom again if we need to, or even as a Cachalot function.

I have included the picture round (shipping House flags) to see how you get on. Answers are at the end of the Cachalot!

RP



Southampton MtS Port

Chaplain honoured

The Mission to Seafarers has announced that Southampton Port Chaplain, John Attenborough is the recipient of this year's Thomas Gray Silver medal award.

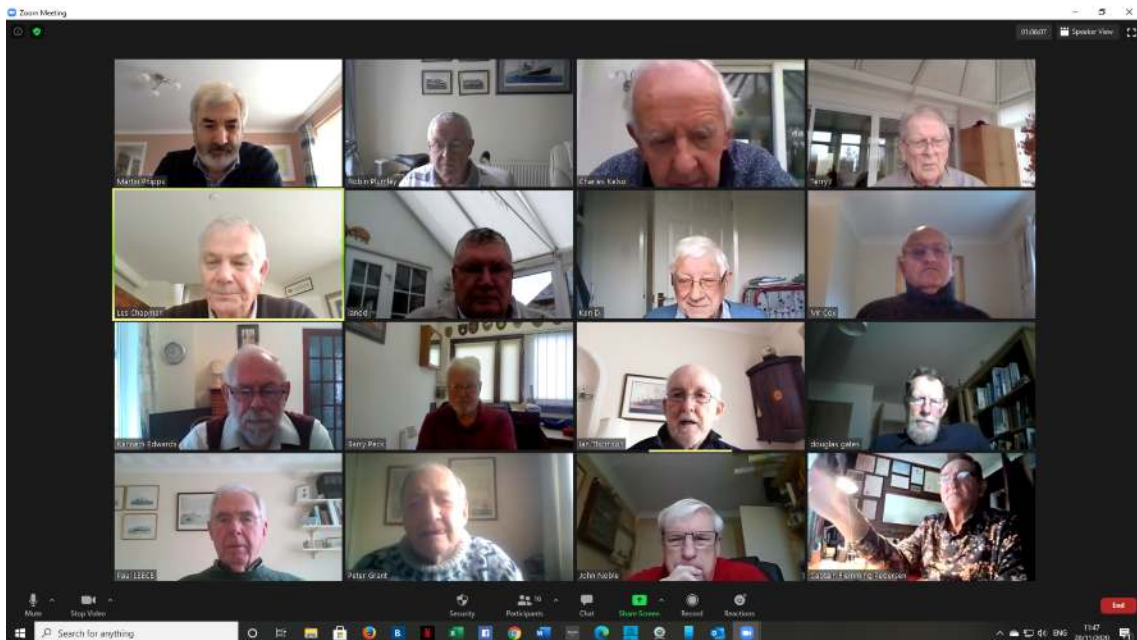
[Read this article](#) to find out more about why John was selected as the 2020 winner.

John is an Honorary Chaplain of the Club

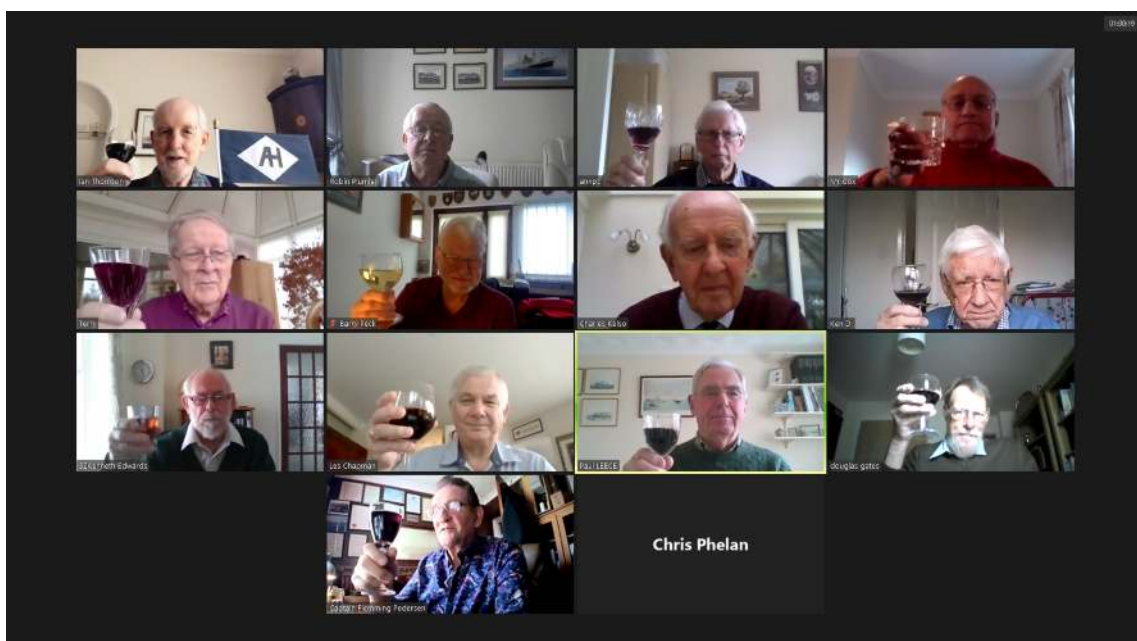


Friday Zoom meetings

On the 20th November our Friday meeting gave us a whole screen of sixteen members joining us on Zoom. How many more can we get until we are able to meet again in person?



And at 1130 on the following Friday those shown below were not trying out the Boatsteerer's Covid-19 test but were raising a glass in memory of **Simon Culshaw** whose funeral was taking place at that precise time. Simon was not a Cachalot but a Blue Funnel man, friend and colleague of several of those present, who was also a Past Master of the HCMM and known to many throughout the maritime world.



The Vaccine

"Land Ho" the population called! "The Vaccine is in sight!"
With any luck we could be home, perhaps, tomorrow night.
What have we learned since we embarked upon this ghastly cruise?
And found ourselves reported nightly, on the TV news?
Not much, it might be said, except that we're dependent on
The NHS to keep us safe and let us carry on
At all. And let us all enjoy the normal daily round,
As men and women, children, others, all with feet on ground.

We are at sea at present, knowing much can still go wrong.
Our pleasure cruise has turned into this nightmare voyage long.
Is it too soon, as yet, to even think of mooring-ropes?
Is it too soon, as yet, to even think of raising hopes?
Of course it isn't. Such is now the proper thing to do:
As circumstance applies alike to passengers and crew.
We all can see The Vaccine now, and knew that it was there.
This is no time for relaxation. Rather, extra care.

The hazards which yet lie ahead are largely still unknown.
We are all in this together. We are, none of us, alone.
And vigilance shall be our watchword still, to see things through.
It's far too soon as yet to celebrate or ballyhoo.
Pilotage is what is needed now, from those who know,
Already, from experience, the way which we should go.
The Vaccine is our landfall, nothing more and nothing less.
We cannot leave the way ahead to hazard or to guess.

Guide us, O Thou Great Redeemer, on this unknown sea.
Let us heed the ones who know. And trust that they will be
Most learned in the proper ways of action to be taken.
Let errors be corrected where we might have been mistaken.
The Vaccine has alerted us to where we now might be,
In seeking out a safe return to some normality.
And let us learn what it might teach and inwardly digest;
And publicans might trade again in human interest.

Barrie Youde

11.11.2020

Into the citadel

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 764 November 6th 2020

I only ever met a stowaway once, when I was patrolling a darkened tweendeck with the light of my torch and he leaped out from behind a bale of wool, where he claimed to be sleeping. I almost died of fright, before ushering him to the booby hatch and the gangway. He was perfectly well behaved and cheerful as he wandered off along the wharf in Kingston, probably to look for another ship. The police weren't remotely interested, but we redoubled our stowaway searches before we eventually left the port.

It has become a lot nastier these days, witness the drama aboard the tanker Nave Andromeda off the Isle of Wight, when seven of the blighters terrified her crew and caused the Special Boat Service to break out their formidable armoury.

In its way, this incident merely demonstrates what seafarers are having to put up with in so many parts of the world. Seafaring has always been something of a "frontier" existence, but it has become more hazardous at a time when there is this surge in desperate migration, along with piracy, kidnapping and the malevolent influence of the drug cartels. I sometimes think of the little notice most of our ships would have under the glass on the chart table – "You have to be mad to work here" it said. These days there is no doubt.

The vulnerability of the modern seafarer to these "social" problems cannot be denied. On most ships, there are so few of them, so the bodies available to respond to the untoward challenges are just not there. Just a few determined thugs, angry stowaways or enraged migrants picked up at sea will have a small crew at their mercy, no arms being permitted aboard the modern vessel under any circumstances.

Despite the obvious and manifest hazards of the West African coast, none of the solutions that were effective to counter the Somalian piracy – such as armed guards – are permitted by the riparian states. Perhaps understandably enough, as they would angrily deny being "failed states", they see such matters as within their sovereign competence and assert that the defence of merchant shipping in their waters is entirely their business. Sadly the fact that their waters are insufficiently policed for the current level of lawlessness, leaves the merchant mariners once again on their own.

So there are insufficient "perimeter defences" to keep a big ship safe against either kidnappers or indeed desperate stowaways. There will be a comforting logbook entry noting that "a thorough stowaway search has been conducted", but there are probably not enough of a crew to properly examine the ship, while there will be inevitably pressure to get off the berth and away to sea. There are places, such as the rudder trunk, which are difficult to get at, while access to even a well-secured ship may have been facilitated by local corruption, with the watchman ushering the would-be travellers to a safe space.

There is almost certainly more that can be done to make ships more secure and to bolster protection for their crews, except that it all costs a bit of money. Alarm systems, motion activated lighting, better lighting over the side and far greater use of closed circuit and even infra-red TV cameras are regular features of shore-side premises, so why can they not become standard fittings on merchant vessels, which are every bit as valuable? Maybe ships crews cannot be issued with Lee-Enfield muskets (as they were once on the pirate-infested China coast) but they ought to be given what support technology makes available. As the welfare organisations, bless them, constantly make clear, a ship is also the seafarer's home and if it cannot be made a castle, it deserves to provide a reasonable degree of safety in the more dangerous places to which he or she is required to travel.

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



What's the haste to introduce the unmanned ship?

When I went to sea in the mid-40's a United Kingdom flag tween deck cargo ship of, say, 10,000 tons, owned and operated by a UK based liner company would have had a complement of some 48 souls.

Master and 3 or 4 Deck Officers, 2 Deck Cadets and a Radio Officer.

Chief Engineer, 6 Engineer Officers and 1 Electrical Officer.

A Chief Steward, 2nd. Steward, Chief Cook, 2nd. Cook and 5 Catering Ratings.

1 Carpenter, a Boatswain and 12 seamen and 2 Deck Boys

An E.R. Leading Hand and 5 ratings.

All of the Deck Officers, with the possible exception of the 4th. Officer, would have been Certificated - the Chief Officer with Masters, Second Officer with Mates and the Third Officer Second Mates.

The Radio Officer would have held a 1st. Class PMG, the Chief Engineer and Second Engineer 1st. Class Combined Certificates and three other E/O's 2nd. Class Certificates.

The Boatswain and the majority of the seamen would have held certificates as Able Seamen (or EDH) and the Electrician and Carpenter would have had experience in a shipbuilding yard.

All of the Officers and many of the other ranks would have held Company Contracts.

Voyages would have been of 4/6 months duration and upon the vessels's return to the first UK port the Master and many of the Officers enjoyed home leave before the vessel departed on her next deep sea voyage.

The vessel's "home" port would have been a major UK. port -London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Southampton, Bristol - whence she would have returned from her deep-sea voyage and on arrival the ship would be met by Superintendents of the three departments (Deck,Engine and Catering) and subjected to a rigid inspection to ensure that a high standard of maintenance had been maintained.

Maintenance necessitating shore based assistance would be undertaken and the vessel stored and victualled for another voyage.

Periodic inspections of the lifesaving, firefighting and cargo handling equipment would be undertaken and an annual drydocking ensured proper maintenance of the hull and underwater body.

As UK shipping declined it is probable that the vessel would have fallen into foreign ownership and, from experience, subjected to many changes.

Manning would have been cut savagely, probably to no more than 20 in total and the quality of the manning suffered as well. Probably the Master and Chief Officer would have been the only certificated Deck Officers and the certificated ER complement would reduce to two with the Radio Officer carrying the duties of the Electrician. The rating complement (recruited from the Third World and untrained) would have been reduced to the degree whereby the ability to maintain proper lookouts etc. and on-board maintenance suffered - but because her manning costs were a fraction of that of the UK ship, she could afford to reduce freight rates - and compete against a "traditional" flag ship.

Drydockings would be much less frequent and any "superintendency" would have been few and far between !

As running costs for shipping increased and their earnings decreased with the fall in freight rates so the commercial shipping fleets of the World's "traditional" shipping nations declined and the fleets of the "emerging" nations increased. Maritime safety has become a very real cause for concern and as ships get bigger and faster so that concern increases.

Insofar as ships sailing under the Red Ensign are concerned it would appear that there are adequate controlling bodies to ensure that they are operated safely and competently but it is dubious if the same can be said for the mass of non-UK flag ships visiting our ports and navigating in our waters.

Today, the situation on a global basis is a worrying one in terms of a threat to the environment and the lives of those who occupy the oceans of the World. The UK flag fleet has shrunk to a miniscule level - and training is at an all-time low. Low cost, untrained and inexperienced seafarers are replacing flag nationals and the Officers of the now defunct traditional shipping countries are forced to seek employment under flags where their training and competence are used to bolster-up the inadequacies of their shipmates.

CRK 25.10.20



Home truths on recording practices

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 765 November 20th 2020

A fine piece of research has emerged from the World Maritime University which put together a team to look at the regulations surrounding the recording of seafarers' hours of work and rest. Are people flogging their hours to stay apparently legal and ensure that any inspectors leave with smiles on their faces? Perish the thought! We need to think about the practice as one of "adjustment" which seems rather more respectable, when it is put like that.

Nevertheless, the report "A Culture of Adjustment" points to such widespread malpractices that you have to wonder what the point was of all those well-meaning regulations designed, several years ago, to prevent seafarers keeling over from exhaustion because of the normal operation of their ships. It summarises these as "systemic failures", but it might better be described as all sides; shipping companies, regulators and the wretched seafarers themselves, effectively colluding in a system which just isn't working.

It very effectively confirms all the anecdotal evidence that filters from the sea in their unofficial channels to the shore – that the whole concept of "safe" manning levels agreed between ship operators and flag states is wishful thinking and that there are just not enough bodies on most ships to do all the work that needs to be done. We have always known that "the ship comes first" and that if the choice is going to bed, or turning to and sailing, or completing a task, there really isn't a contest. The researchers put it rather nicely - "prioritising your allegiance" – this conflict which invariably only settled one way.

It is made quite clear, from the large number of quotations from very many interviewees, that the most important aspect is not to implement the regulations, but to demonstrate that they are being complied with. That way, there will be no awkward questions from port state inspectors about red marks in the hours reports, and subsequent "we fail to understand" communications from angry managers ashore. The often terrible relationship between those afloat and ashore frequently seems to come to the fore, with people aboard more worried about their job security than they would be working for decent employers.


The researchers go to town on the sheer inhumanity and impracticality of the 6/6hr watch system practiced in so many small ships, and the utter impossibility of their operating/rest hours remaining "legal". But they then point to the fierce defenders

of such a system which involve people working hours that wouldn't look out of place in a Victorian coal mine. They also emphasise that it is a ship's time in port which throw up the most problems, from the port state inspectors waking up exhausted ships' personnel to verify their hours of rest records, and visitors demanding attention from officers who haven't been off their feet, possibly for days.

And in the macho culture of shipping, when the priority above all else is expediting the voyage, there seems little faith that any feedback from the ship will be treated with any serious intent. There is no sense that any appeal for extra hands to spread the burden more fairly will not fall on stony ground.

This report is well worth reading and also begs a lot of awkward questions about other systems that look brilliant on paper, but fall very flat when translated to the workings of a busy ship. How much of the doubtless important work at IMO, on necessary regulations, are going to end up with extra work for the ever-fewer people aboard ship? Think of the awesome amount of regulations on fuel and emissions in the current legislative pipeline that will keep masters and chief engineers burning the midnight oil in future years. And yet, think of the people who might have helped with this burden in past years – the pursers – radio officers – writers – additional officers – whose ranks were deemed superfluous by the bean counters and purged without a second thought.

The WMU work, which ought to ruffle a lot of feathers, talks of “cognitive dissonance”, where deviance is normalised”. I suppose you might suggest that deviance is only normalised because anything else is seen to be impractical by all the “stakeholders”, although they would prefer to use the polite term “adjustment” to describe something less respectable. And you might also suggest that there is another culture – that of cheapness, which ensures that ships will continue to be under-manned, because their users just won't pay for anything better. And that culture will take some changing.

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Captain Ken

Cachalot Ken Owen spent 54 years at sea, from midshipman to master, and was twice Sea-Staff Captain of the club – in 1999 and again in 2003. He was Lloyd's List's 'International Shipmaster of the Year' in 2004. He lives in the Derbyshire Peak District and has been writing about some of his sea going experiences for his local Mellor Church Parish Magazine "Outlook". Ken has kindly given us his permission to reprint some of them here. This is his latest one, for the December '20 edition, and recalls some seasonal memories.

Following the tremendous TV coverage of the USA presidential election, I have noticed how often Philadelphia has been included. This reminded me of an incident when my ship m.v. 'Ulysses' was there in the late fifties. We were engaged on a schedule running between the Far East and USA, and it was known as the 'Pendulum' service.

Many years later I was on an American ship engaged on the very same schedule, but which the Americans called the 'screen-wiper' service.

In the post war years, the USA Immigration department was particularly vigilant, even more so than now. They certainly had no sense of humour, and when you were asked, as everybody was, 'Do you intend to assassinate the President of the United States?' it was wise to reply 'no', rather than to make a joke about it.

We had one Liverpool engine room hand, who when asked, 'Is there any record of insanity in your family?' replied, 'Well I have got a sister who married a Yank'. She was in fact a G.I. bride. The consequence was that he was denied any shore leave at all.

The Immigration officials were particularly strict with any of our Chinese crew members who were never allowed ashore at any time. To ensure they were confined to the ship, an armed guard was permanently stationed at the top of the gangway, and another at the dock exit gate.

You can imagine their surprise when, prior to our departure, one Chinese crew member was no longer on board. We discovered that during the night a particularly cold spell had descended on us and the river had frozen over. Our crew member who had family in Pennsylvania, had simply packed his suitcase, put a rope ladder over the side, and walked along the frozen river, to the city centre.

In the recent world pandemic, in general, national immigration departments have been particularly unfriendly to seafarers. It is believed that some 300,000 seafarers are currently desperate to be relieved from their ships, and some 100,000 anxious to return to employment. It is a very serious situation resulting in some tragic mental casualties.

The international basis of worldwide shipping is now truly amazing. Shortly before my retirement, I was recommended by a Scottish agency to a German management company based in Cyprus, to command a new American owned Japanese built container ship, whose containers were all made in China, which was registered in the Marshall Islands, operated by a firm in Singapore and insured in London. The officers came from Croatia and India and the crew from the Philippines and Myanmar.

I was particularly fortunate in my career as I was always employed by very high quality top management, and all the seafarers, with whom I served, were of an equal high quality. I regret to say that such was not the situation with many of my



Blue Funnel's 'Ulysses'

peers, who have much sadder stories to unfold.

As a rather unusual Christmas approaches, I am reminded of one a few years ago, when we were west bound from Malaysia to New York on our 'screen-wiper' service, when we called at a new container transit port on the Calabria coast of Italy.

My wife Allwyn, had joined the ship in Singapore, and had the brilliant idea that we could take our Filipino chief cook to the village supermarket, and there purchase some additional luxury items for Christmas, which we anticipated celebrating in mid Atlantic. We had been kindly allotted a generous gift of money for this purpose, from our owners and charterers.

Our agent arranged a taxi which kindly dropped us off at a little bar I knew, owned by a former Italian P&O cruise ship steward. When I explained the situation to my friend, he said, 'Well I've some bad news and some good. First, as you know everything round here is owned by the Mafia, including the supermarket, which is closed. The good news is that the two men at the bar, with leather coats and sun glasses are the Mafia'.

We explained our situation to them, and they agreed to open up for an hour so we could purchase whatever we wanted, provided we paid in U.S. dollars. The supermarket cashier wasn't too happy, as other local customers started taking advantage of the surprise opening, but our crew were delighted with the three full trolleys our Christmas gift had purchased.

Allwyn, then satisfied we were well set up for Christmas, took the taxi along the amazing cliff top road, to Reggio Calabria, on the Messina Straits, from where she flew home via Turin in good time for Christmas with the rest of our family. And of course to ensure the donkey was arranged for the Crib Services at Mellor Church.



Sustainability has a human face

Seatrade Maritime Opinion and Analysis, November 2020

I had just finished reading about the ship detained in Australia because the authorities found a large portion of the crew had been aboard for an inordinate time (two had served for more than 20 months). It sort of served as an appetiser for a press release from the Sustainable Shipping Initiative and the Institute for Human Rights and Business to introduce a joint project to develop what they described as a "human rights code of conduct for charterers". Along with a batch of SSI members; The China Navigation Company, Forum for the Future, Louis Dreyfus Company, Oldendorff Carriers, RightShip, South 32 and the Standard Chartered Bank, the project has been accelerated by the plight of the hundreds of thousands of seafarers who have been unable to leave or join their ships during the pandemic.

The partners, who you might suggest are drawn from the ranks of the "good guys", suggest that charterers have been under the spotlight as a result of the plague, not always for the very best of reasons. There have been some incidents where charterers have been very unco-operative in terms of the need for crew to be relieved, unwilling to cut the operators, or indeed the crew, the slightest slack.

But it is a hugely positive move that recognises that the "sustainability" of the supply chain is rather more than the green credentials of the transport system and that the welfare of those who drive the ships, trains and trucks need to be factored in to the equation. It is also (for shipping) a belated recognition that just as the human rights of garment workers in sweat-shops need to influence the purchase of finished clothes, the seafarers need to be placed at centre stage of the transport chain.

You might suggest that the initiative is long overdue. A few years ago there was an attempt by the officers' union Nautilus to promote the notion of "Fair Transport", as a sort of adjunct to the Fairtrade system, but it never really went anywhere. It is easy to be a bit cynical about the idea of the charterer with a conscience, "the customer is always right" being a more normal reaction to any "give and take" over chartering terms. Most people who have worked in the shipping industry for a while will have recollections that show charterers getting heavy handed about what they see as their rights.

I have an awful recollection of a conference on "Quality Shipping", held at the time that elderly bulk carriers were sinking and drowning their crews at an alarming rate. In the midst of a debate about whether charterers should be more concerned about the human cost of these tragedies, a chartering manager from a major European importer of iron ore and large-scale user of capesize bulkers rose to his feet. He (disgracefully as he was a former seafarer) said that he would only consider the rate as the sole criteria, as he decided whether to take a ship. Sustainability, or indeed human rights in their modern context, had not yet been invented, but I recall a sort of shudder going round the hall, even though the facts suggested that such an attitude was shared by others.

It was about that time, with bulkers sinking almost weekly, that the then Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organisation William O'Neil decided that enough was enough and used his office to get the issue raised at the highest global level. IMO S-G's had no history of what might be described as "unilateral" action, so there were some raised eyebrows at this strategy, but with the weight of his office behind it, the intervention bore fruit and drew attention to this scandalous waste of life. It might be recalled that international action, soon followed, suggesting that procedure and protocols could be set aside when there was a strong moral and practical case to do so. He subsequently had no hesitation in intervening after other marine disasters.

I thought of Mr O'Neil in that context, when I read about his sad death a few days ago. This kindly but determined engineer enhanced the reputation of the IMO over very many years, he was always approachable and interested in every facet of this fascinating industry. I'm sure he would have approved of any policies that improved the human rights of those who go down to the sea in ships.

Published with the kind permission of the editor of Seatrade-Maritime www.seatrade-maritime.com and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey. rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk

Help wanted

Transitioning aboard

Oh-oh. Trouble! In Baltimore harbour in May 1958 the company agent came aboard Ellerman's Calcutta-bound *City of Bath*.

He announced that two journalists were waiting down on the wharf. The quarry in their sights was the ship's doctor Laurence Michael Dillon.

Alcohol issues? No, far from it. 'Doc Mike' had just been revealed as being, by birth, Laura. The news was hot because he was next in line for the baronetcy of Lismullen.

A discrepancy between *Debrett's and Burke's Peerage* had exposed the issue: was it Laura or Laurence who'd been born on May Day 1915?

Nowadays Michael Dillon is acclaimed as the first woman to have medically transitioned. Thirteen operations between 1942 and 1949, as well as taking oestrogen pills, had enabled a troubled girl guide and Oxford graduate in Greats into a bearded man.

He'd not been one of the exceptional people shamed by the Sunday papers as having 'changed sex'. Their transformation was often superficial and seldom involved operations or hormone treatment at that early stage.

Instead, media-free, this Folkestone-based child of an RN lieutenant had had six relatively quiet years of seafaring as a man (at a time when lady ship's doctors were rare; Dr Wynne O'Mara at Blue Funnel in 1950 was the first).

But that day in May, 62 years ago, Michael had to recognise he' was just about to be made globally visible as an anomaly.

At 8am the pressure began when a steward brought a cable to his surgery. The *Daily Express* demanded to know 'Do you intend to claim the title, since your changeover? Kindly cable.' And now these pesky reporters were demanding his attention out on the dockside.

He wrote in his autobiography, *Out of the Ordinary*, 'I ... lit my pipe to steady my nerves and put on my cap ... went down the gangway' resuming the 'old poker face' he'd got out of the habit of wearing. There, by the ship, he faced the 'not unsympathetic' reporters.

'Finally, after answering questions in the shortest possible way and volunteering nothing, I was allowed to leave.' They'd taken photos of him smoking his pipe.

Michael came back on board and 'made a bee-line for the captain's cabin praying he might be in his paternal mood ... [Fortunately] he became kindly and sympathetic at once, and promised to do all he could do to help ... cabled the agents in New York asking for a police guard for the gangway.'

Next day, still in Baltimore, the Third Mate announced "'there's a photographer on the gangway, what would you like us to do with him?'" Immensely grateful ... I grinned and showed him with a jerk of my thumb.'

By the middle of that second day no one, bar the Third, had said anything. So, to see how things stood, Michael went to the Second's cabin for the usual midday drink. Sparks was there too and they welcomed him.

'The Second poured me out a gin, raised his glass, and knocked mine and then said they had discussed it at length over beer the night before and had come to the conclusion that I had had a rough deal ... since they had liked me before and I had not changed overnight they saw no reason for letting it make any difference.'

By contrast the Mate said 'of course he always had felt there was something wrong but couldn't put a finger on it and now it was obvious. But he got no support in this.' The ship sailed. The heavens had not fallen in.

'We reached New York where we lay for ten days loading. .. I was confined not only to the ship but to its starboard deck, that one away from the wharf ...[which was] filled with milling people, many waving cameras.'

Letters started arriving, offering sympathy. The chairman of Ellermans replied to Michael's news offering 'his sympathy'. The medical superintendent said he "still hoped I would stay with the company and would back any arrangements I liked." But it would have been an impossible situation ... I would have been the target for speculation and whispers, until they got to know me.'

And so 'Doc Mike' asked to be discharged from the *City of Bath* in India, intending to disappear into a monastery. Just after his 43 birthday he began a new life, becoming the first westerner to become a Buddhist novice, but died in 1962.



Ellerman & Bucknall's *City of Bath*



Doctor Dillon

The point of retelling this story is to ask if any Cachalot members ever heard aspects of this story being circulated by old-timers. Do members have any stories of how captains handled people who'd transitioned?

April Ashley had joined the Merchant Navy in 1951, a year before Michael. She'd become famous after transitioning in 1960, but had long since swallowed what she saw as an uncongenial anchor. By contrast Michael was maritime history's first female-to-male trans person, ten years earlier.

Why bring this up now? Because there are plans afoot for a blue plaque to Michael. And St Anne's College, his old alma mater 1934-38, is beginning a series of public lectures in his name. <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/the-michael-dillon-lgbt-lectures-lgbt-rights-in-a-time-of-pandemic-tickets-126679203909>.

There's new interest from shoresiders. But I want to fill in the maritime side of the history of transitioning. Do please talk to me, in confidence. I can be reached at doctorjostanley@gmail.com. Thank you.



Picture from Dr Jo Stanley's
[blogspot, below](#)

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Gone Aloft **Captain Leslie Street**

Leslie Street was a Master Mariner who attended Boulevard pre-sea training in Hull and first worked on trawlers before serving his time as a cadet with Bank Line. He progressed his career through to Master with Fred Olsen Line, Manchester Liners, Post Office Cable ships, Court Line and Blandford Shipping, serving on cargo ships, tankers, bulk carriers and passenger ships. After three years as Master with Thome Shipmanagement he came ashore and tried hotel and public house ownership without success before working in port control in Poole. Then on to Colchester as Harbour Master/Pilot before ending his career with 16 years as a Thames Pilot with the PLA, 13 of them as 1st Class. He retired in 2007 and lived with his wife Jill near Sherborne in Dorset.

Les joined the Club in 2014 and said at the time that he enjoyed being in the company of people in the same profession because hearing them talk helped to jog his failing memory. Sadly, he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2010 and became gradually without memories.

Whilst in Yeovil Hospital recovering from pneumonia he contracted Covid-19 and was then transferred to a Covid ward in Swanage Hospital where he "Went Aloft" on the 19th November 2020.

He will be greatly missed and our condolences go to his wife Jill and their family.

Reg Kelso and the Union Castle Line

As promised in the previous newsletter here is the account of Captain Kelso's career that appeared in 'The Wake of the Cachalots' by Simon Daniels

From time to time life on the schoolship 'Conway' was enlivened by the return of former cadets splendidly attired in uniform and pockets ajangle with money. Having paid their respects to the hierarchy they then descended to the mess decks to meet with their former cronies and others fortunate enough to be permitted to listen to their stories of life at sea.

Royal Naval midshipmen had invariably retained their metal cap-stretchers and their perfectly formed caps were in marked contrast to those of their Merchant Navy colleagues whose battered and mis-shapen caps had been lovingly formed to reflect their 'old salt' image.

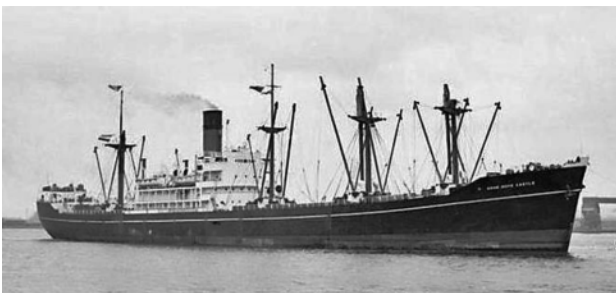
The war was just drawing to a close and some of their stories were sad ones, bringing news of the death of some who were only names to many of us by virtue of their prowess on the rugby field or in the boxing ring but invariably the casual mention of foreign ports sent a tingle down my spine. They tripped off their tongues without thought or effort and for a brief second each one conjured up its own picture in the listener's mind.

Then there were the cap badges. The well shaped caps sported the Royal Navy badge but the headwear of the Merchantmen sported a vast variety, each one depicting the chosen shipping company of the wearer. Of these the most distinctive was the Blue Star Line and the least was Alfred Holt. In between lay the designs of the Peninsular and Oriental, Shaw Savill, Palm Line, Clan Line, Pacific Steam Navigation Company, the list was endless.

I can never recall a Union-Castle cadet returning to 'Conway' but my interest in the company was aroused during my early morning arrivals in Belfast by steamer when proceeding home on leave. At that time the Union-Castle ships with their distinctive lavender grey hulls and red and black funnels were being refitted at Harland and Wolff where they had been built and as the steamer navigated the Pollock Channel I invariably saw the squat outline of one of them.

I applied to join the company in January 1946 (I was due to leave 'Conway' in April) and got a brusque reply. I could, if I wished, apply nearer to my completion date and if there were any vacancies I would be granted an interview. I discussed the situation with my shipmates and we agreed that it might be better to try elsewhere. I wrote to Alfred Holt and to Blue Star, and both agreed to give me an interview at a later date.

The weeks passed until, in early March, I received a letter from Union-Castle instructing me to report for interview in Glasgow two days hence. I was duly despatched and returned to 'Conway' two days later with a promise of immediate employment as a cadet with The Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company. Final examinations were long-forgotten as I packed my bags and after the customary farewell party for a few chosen friends at the County Hotel, Bangor, I returned home for a short leave and kitting out.



Good Hope Castle, the first of many happy ships

On the 2nd April I joined the night steamer in Belfast and arrived in Glasgow next morning where, in accordance with my instructions, I joined *Good Hope Castle* at Number 2 Ballasting Crane, Queens Dock. As I reached the top of the gangway a young man in a white jacket appeared from a doorway and said the never-to-be-forgotten phrase, "Good morning, Sir, have you had breakfast?"

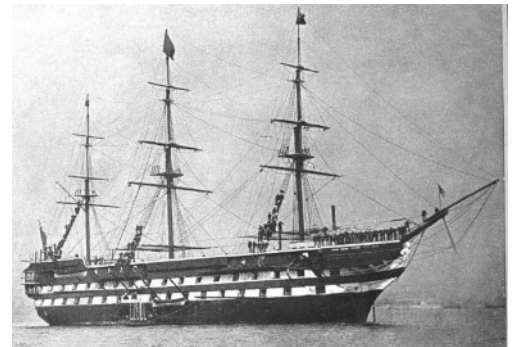
Immediately I was aware of a feeling of welcome, of warmth and of friendship - feelings which never left me, afloat or ashore, during the next forty two years. Years which were to see the decline of those great fleets whose former servants had held us spellbound on our 'Conway' seachests, splendid in their liveries and steadfast in their loyalties. Years which saw the decline and fall of

the Union-Castle Line and the disappearance of the 'Castle' name from the oceans of the world. Years which were very different from those we had grown to expect but which, in their own way, were every bit as exciting and rewarding.

Life in Union-Castle centred around the Southampton-based mailship fleet. At table on the cargo ships much of the conversation was of earlier service in the mailships and those of us yet to enjoy those delights listened spellbound to lusty stories of romance and abandon under the tropic moon. Sometimes loading newsprint in the snowy wastes of Cornerbrook or sugar in the steaming cauldron of Port Louis, our thoughts strayed to the delights to come and spirits were rekindled.

My first mailship was *Capetown Castle* and I joined her with a brand new Second Mate's Certificate. This in itself was an innovation because hitherto Junior Fourth Officers were all holders of a First Mate's Certificate, at least, and most had Master's but in this postwar period more tonnage was being manned and such luxuries had to be trimmed.

As Junior Officer of the Watch one had a well-established routine and woe betide the upstart who tried to exceed his authority. After 'steading on' the steering compass and the standard compass and checking the compass error by celestial bearing, one retired to the wing of the bridge unless invited into the wheel-house by the Senior - a very unlikely event. Talking to the Bridge Quartermaster or Bridge Boy was frowned upon, unless absolutely necessary, and although many of



HMS Conway

those reporting to the bridge could impart their messages to you, they nevertheless had to be directed to the wheelhouse where the Senior Watchkeeper, seated on the flag locker, talked horses with the Steering Quartermaster. Rounds of the exterior passenger decks had to be completed quickly and discreetly with anything of a contentious nature avoided lest the Senior Officer be called upon to write a report. A change of Steering Quartermaster dictated another 'steading on' and another compass error check, then back to the bridge wing again until it was time to call the next watch.

By day, passengers had to be shown around the bridge and during this time the Senior invariably stalked the bridge wing mouthing at the Junior "Get rid of them" unless a pretty woman in the party engaged him in conversation. The social life was everything we had heard about it during our cadetship. Meals were taken in the First Class Dining Room complete with orchestra and frock-coated head waiter. One dressed in mess kit with stiff, starched shirt and wing collar and after a week the two paged menu became almost boring and the fillet mignon ceased to be a novelty.

We were not encouraged to mix with the passengers ("Be polite but do not seek to prolong the conversation") but we needed no encouragement and we DID. We were forbidden to entertain in our cabins but were seldom caught and it became an art form to spend every penny of our weekly twenty one shilling bond allowance. Passenger prices were more expensive than ours, so signing cards on deck was a costly exercise and one had to weigh up the possible advantages of doing so.

In port we worked watches and in our off duty periods we enjoyed South African hospitality to the full, playing golf, cricket and rugby, climbing Table Mountain, and supervising the cargo work while awaiting with dread the arrival of the letter promoting us to Third Officer of a cargo ship. The radio room kept us fully informed of the movements of our contemporaries and every chartroom had an updated staff list of each ship in the fleet, which was scoured anxiously to see who might be the next to move.

On arrival at Southampton, every deck officer was interviewed by the Marine Superintendent and not until that was over, could he return to the ship and change into civilian clothes to proceed on leave. Not everybody was granted leave and sometimes one was appointed to staff duties looking after the 'dead' mailship in Southampton pending the return of her sea staff. Officially there was no eating on board at such times and one was paid a subsistence allowance to cover food and 'digs' ashore. Eventually, after one of our number keeled over when tallying mails and was diagnosed as suffering from malnutrition, we were given a lunch meal (and reduced subsistence) but it was still a generous settlement and one could maintain one's social life and still eat enough to keep fit without running into debt.

The Round Africa ships were based in London. For many years the London Office and the Southampton Office had enjoyed a rivalry spawned during the years of the Union Line and the Castle Line. In the Southampton Office an instruction to proceed to London docks to join a ship was given in tones of disapproval -and with a modest degree of sympathy - while anyone arriving in Southampton from a London-based ship was treated with suspicion and a good deal of reserve until they had been in port for some time and had abandoned their slovenly London habits.

It was little different in the London Dock Office. There they pretended that the mailships did not exist and anyone reporting there from Southampton was treated to a diatribe about London standards and how one was here to work. London staff officers lived in rather less luxury than did their Southampton counterparts but the subsistence allowance was equally generous and the fleshpots of West Ham and North Woolwich beckoned.

In those early days one spiralled through promotion always returning to the Mail Fleet to renew acquaintances and then disappearing off into the realms of the cargo ships or London-based passenger ships before being promoted back to the Mails once again. Third Officer Cargo Ship was followed by Third Officer Round Africa, then Second Officer Cargo Ship, Third Officer Mailship, Extra Second Officer Round Africa, Second Officer Mailship, Chief Officer Cargo, First Officer Mail, Chief Officer Round Africa, Chief Officer Mailship; then Command Cargo Ship. That was the laid-down career pattern, although in practice such a well-defined course was seldom followed and temporary promotions or demotions were commonplace.

To be concluded in the next edition



Capetown Castle - his first mailship



Contributors all

Michael Grey,
Captain Reg Kelso

&

Captain Ken Owen
at the Sea Pie Supper in 2013.

Japanese adventure on the m.v. SURAT

Past Captain Andrew Tinsley recalls a memorable incident

When you walked up the gangway to join a new ship there was no indication as to what lay ahead. This was the case when, as third officer, in November 1963 I travelled to London to join the P&O cargo ship *m.v. Surat* which traded between Europe and the Far East. The *Surat*, 9,500 tons, carried a crew of 70 plus 12 passengers. Whilst the Officers were all British, as were the passengers, the crew were Bombay Indian (deck crew), Pakistani (engine room) and Goanese (catering).



On the outward voyage we sailed via The Suez Canal calling at Penang, Port Swettenham, Singapore and Hong Kong, then on towards Kushiro, a small port on the East coast of Japan's Northernmost Island Hokkaido, where we were to load cuttlefish.

Our Captain, known as Fearless Freddie, was a "character" who liked to impress passengers and crew by passing close to land and other vessels. Unfortunately, one beautiful January morning with only a few miles to our destination, we ran aground on a charted rocky outcrop. The impact was at 18 knots and resulted in the ship hard aground on a reef and suffering severe damage. Efforts to free the ship by running the engines full astern were to no avail. With water entering the engine room, the watertight doors were closed and the Japanese Coast Guard advised, with a request to evacuate our passengers to a nearby fishing village. Miss Peebles, who had been a Governess to Prince Charles, was one of the passengers and she regarded the whole episode as a great adventure. They subsequently joined another P&O vessel.

With calm weather we waited until morning for salvage tugs to arrive. P&O London arranged for repairs to be carried out in Hakodate which was the nearest port with dry dock facilities. The dry dock was too short but the Japanese, in their usual manner, advised it would be extended by the following day. This was done by blasting and involved evacuating some of the locals! The salvage tugs laid out four anchors and together with tugs and ship's power managed, after 24 hours, to free the ship and we headed, assisted by tugs, to the nearest port to assess the damage.

We then went on to dry dock in Hakodate where it was found that most of the bottom plating was damaged beyond repair with the coagulated heavy fuel leaking into the dry dock. With temperatures well below freezing it was a horrendous task for the shipyard workers to shovel 600 tons of coagulated oil into 40 gallon drums. This job was completed in three days then the steel work repairs commenced.

The ship's officers and crew all stayed aboard, except for the Captain who was recalled to London and subsequently sacked.....he was later a successful secretary of a Southport golf club!

Most people had never seen a European and very little English was spoken in the area. The salvage company were very helpful in arranging various activities for us including ice skating and skiing on the mountain which caused much amusement for the locals. Reports of the activities of us all were shown regularly on TV and in the press - we became part of the entertainment!

With three friends I was fortunate to visit the Trappist Monastery, established in the late 1800s by nine monks from France. They were so pleased to see other Europeans and welcomed us warmly.

Although there were cinemas in Hakodate the numerous bars and nightclubs were most popular. The pretty Japanese hostesses were eager to entertain the strangers from a foreign land. I was friendly with the Mamasan of one bar, who appointed me "bar manager" to keep order and drink as much beer as I wished.

Repair work remained on schedule with tanks, plus over 50 bottom plates, being replaced. After sea trials, by which time our new Captain had arrived, we loaded a full cargo of motor cycles and sailed for London via Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Our Northern Japanese adventure still brings back happy memories of kind people, wonderful hospitality and great fun.....despite the fact it was actually a marine disaster.

The full story appears in "The Illustrated Diary of a Thames Pilot" by the late John Foot who was 2nd Officer on the Surat at the time and can be read online [here](#).

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 plumleyrobin@yahoo.co.uk



Read it on your Kindle too

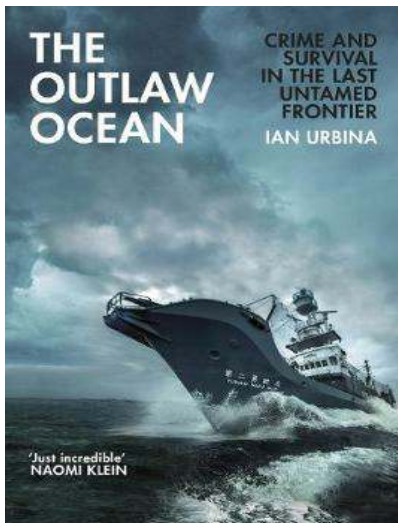
We can also send a copy of these newsletters, (including ALL the previous ones, on request) direct to your Kindle device, as well as to your normal email address.

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.



Recommended reading



Cachalot Paul Leece has recommended that you add 'The Outlaw Ocean' by Ian Urbina to your wish list.

He writes, "I was given a copy of this book as a Christmas present last year, and I recommend it to everyone who has experience of the sea and ships. It is sold as 'riveting' and 'adrenalin fuelled' but it is much more because it is fact based on the personal research and investigations of the author. Far from our view of an ordered world of our fleets, this is the criminal world where authorities take a 'not my problem view of things' and all types of criminals operate freely.

Order it from Waterstones ([Click here](#)) who are struggling at the moment.

ISBN 9781847925855

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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

18th December 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.

Answers to the picture round of the Zoom Quiz, p 6

Canadian Pacific, Port Line, Comben Longstaff, Hain Nourse

Houston Line, White Star Line, Wightlink, Wallenius Lines

Alfred Holt, Moore McCormack Lines, Bank Line, Houlder Line

Royal Mail Lines, Shaw Savill & Albion, Elder Dempster, Geest Lines

Ben Line, Bibby Line, British & Commonwealth, *and finally*

The Southampton, Isle of Wight and South of England Royal Mail Steam Packet Company Limited, or Red Funnel for short

Blue to mast, green to fly, red on deck, white on high