

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 87

Digital Edition

April 2021

Captain's Log

My column is slightly easier to write this month as there is, at last, a little Club news to report. I will not steal the Boatsteerer's thunder, as his blog elsewhere in this newsletter reports well on our recent Management Committee Meeting. In summary, there is now an intention to reopen the Club Rooms and recommence Saturday lunches at Kutis once lockdown restrictions end in late June, and hopes of a golf competition later in the year. There was also enough optimism for all to agree that planning to hold a Sea Pie Supper in February 2022 should begin in earnest. All good so far.

There is less positive news about this year's Shipping Festival Service. Winchester Cathedral's new charges for dedicated services meant that to keep costs down this year's Shipping Festival Service would have been held on Saturday 12 June, to coincide with a scheduled evensong service. However, as this date falls in Phase 3, before the end of full lockdown, the service needed to be re-scheduled to maximise attendance. Unfortunately, negotiations to hold the service on Saturday 4 September, to coincide with Merchant Navy Day, have been unsuccessful, so a decision was taken to cancel the event this year. It also leaves the club with a dilemma; whether to persevere with Winchester Cathedral, in the hope that a mutually acceptable and affordable solution can be found, or to look for another venue for 2022.

If anyone needed reminding of the importance to the UK of the merchant navy, it has come this week with the news that at around 0740 local time on Tuesday 23 March the ultra large container vessel (ULCV) *Ever Given* became stuck across the Suez Canal, completely blocking all movement of traffic in both directions. As I write, it remains unclear whether the grounding was caused by a blackout onboard (as initially reported) or strong crosswinds, though I can attest to the latter being a significant problem for high-sided vessels transiting the Suez Canal. I

believe that *Ever Given* was operating on the Ocean Alliance's NEU6 route and, if so, would have called at Felixstowe as part of its Northern Europe rotation. With hundreds of ships queuing, a number of operators have already decided to route their ships around the Cape of Good Hope, adding about 8000 miles to the trip.

For a country where 95% of imports and exports move by sea, is this a major crisis? Well, after the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, probably not. Some imports will likely arrive late, and shipping costs might rise for a while. However, shipping is incredibly flexible and 'the mail will get through'. And that is the point. As Cachalots, we understand the importance to this country of the Merchant Navy, but there is no harm in reminding others just how reliant our economy is on the sea. We might not be able to hold a Shipping Festival Service this year, but I very much hope that this is not the end of a proud tradition and that the service will be back in style in 2022.

Keep safe

Andrew Moll, Club Captain



WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

Zoom Meeting

Again, of the Dorset branch of the World Ship Society

2.30pm, Saturday, April 10th 2021

Cableships and the Internet ~ with Barry Peck

... see what a modern Cableship does ...

CS Sovereign, Resolute & more

... enabling the internet economy ...

Their Secretary, Steve Pink, says:

There is no need to request an invitation to our April event ... everyone on our circulation list will be sent a Zoom Invitation Link about a week beforehand ... but do make sure its in your diary.

If you are not yet on that list, visit their website shipsdorset.org and follow the links.

With increasing interest in the Branch and its online initiatives and events during the pandemic, they seek to finance some of their increased costs by inviting donations from those who would support them.

Again, explained on their website. [Here](#)

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Boatsteerers' Locker

Greetings to all our members and readers. The past month has seen little change in circumstances for most of us but hopefully the light at the end of the tunnel will start to make for some happier times ahead.

Based on the 'data' dates of our Dear Leader, and the expectation all restrictions will be removed, we would hope to resume attendance at the Club room in the Royal British Legion (RBL) from Friday 25th June. We will be guided by the arrangements in place by the RBL and will provide a protocol for ourselves which may include continuing with the use of hand sanitizer and sensibly distanced seating in our room. Our arrangements will be promulgated in good time ahead of our expected return.

As a 'first' opportunity for an outside event, our Function's Officer will be making contact with Kuti's at the Royal Pier to resurrect our Saturday curry lunches. Again, details to follow.

The **250 Club** draw continues to be made by our independent Office Administrator Richard and his wife Jill at their home with a live phone call for Zoom attendees to listen to at our Friday Zoom gathering. The draw results for March are included in this edition of the Digital Cachalot.

The next draw will be made at midday during the Zoom gathering on Friday 26th March and then Friday 30th April.

Shipping Festival Service 2021

Sadly, at the meeting of the management committee on 18th March, it was unanimously agreed to cancel the Shipping Festival Service being planned for 12th June 2021. An approach was made to the cathedral with a view to holding it on Saturday 4th September which is Merchant Navy Day weekend. However, we determined that we would not be able to go ahead with this option either. We will endeavour to arrange the Shipping Festival Service for June 2022.

Sea Pie Supper 2022

At the same meeting, it was agreed unanimously we should go ahead with the Sea Pie Supper for **Friday 4th February 2022**. Further

details will be published in due course. Tickets will go on sale in November as in previous years.

A couple of our members, Bruce Thomas and Mark Oakley have suggested a Golf Day in September. Bruce has approached Lee-on-Solent Golf Club, where some Cachalots are members. The format will be bacon buttie on arrival, 18 holes of golf followed by a 'Lite lunch'. Depending on take up we may allow members to bring one guest. The approximate cost will be £50 which will include the day and prizes. Please send all notes of interest to me in the first instance. In earlier days there was a Golf Section within the Club. Two cups are in our store, The Charles Webb Cup and the Whitbread Cup. We may use one of these as a returnable prize for the winner. The provisional date is Thursday 30th September 2021. If any members are interested, can you please provide your name along with your current World Handicap index, if you have one.

In the meantime, keep well.

Captain Robin Plumley MBE Boatsteerer



[Zooming in on the latest Suez crisis.](#)

There was a vigorous swinging of the lamp at our latest Zoom meeting as memories of that very special place were dredged from the memory banks.

Most of those online were amazed to learn of the speed of the vessel, said to be 13 knots, in a narrow waterway. It goes against all that we know of interaction and the bank effect. Or have the Suez Canal pilots perfected the art of careering along, bouncing from side to side and relying on the huge cushion of water formed between ship and bank to keep them on the straight. If so, it would be a level of professional expertise not evidenced by any of those present, and in this case it has gone spectacularly wrong. Maybe not the first time but with a much more dramatic outcome? Do the sums and you will see that she was covering her 1312 ft (400m) length in exactly one minute. Watch the online video to see that in the just over two minutes from the port side of the canal



to impact on the starboard side she travelled just over two lengths. Once that sheer to starboard had started there was no way to stop it in time.



The Post Boatsteerer said that George Robey and Jock McGregor had already been in touch, assuring us of their continuing assiduous attention and service once the present little problem was overcome.

Cachalots are reminded that Messers Billy Thompson, Ship Chandler, Master Contractor and yacht agent, were re-confirmed as “Honorary Agent to the Masters of Yachts belonging to members of the Southampton Master Mariners Club during transit of the Suez Canal” by letter from R.A.Stephenson, OBE, Captain, Boatsteerer, dated 6th October 1993. Twentyeight years on, and a reply is eagerly awaited. [click here](#)

The writer, who last transited the canal at least 55 years ago, remembered that he vowed then that he would never, never, ever pay money to visit the land of the pharaohs, a promise that he has stuck by.

Another member recalled the euphoria on board his vessel, en route to or from the Persian Gulf, when for some reason it was diverted around the Cape.

A third could vividly remember the stench of the trench and the corruption which cost his vessel 18,000 cigarettes in bribes, that's 90 cartons, just for the pleasure of a standard transit.

Yet another reliably recounted the occasions in the Bitter Lakes when a pilot would surreptitiously put the vessel on a sand bar, call for tugs and then demand \$40,000 on their behalf. One time the master managed to free the vessel before the tugs arrived, told them to ‘go away’ but still had to pay the \$40,000 ransom for permission to proceed.

Our President recalled the tricks of the Gilly Gilly man, which he said were the closest to magic that he had ever seen. And, sadly, that was the only magic relating to the Suez Canal that our members could recall.



Readers should visit the Daily Splash report of 31st March [Here](#) where Splash's chief opinion writer, Andrew Craig-Bennett, reflects on shipping's 15 minutes of fame.

EVER DRIVEN

At thirteen knots the vessel moves two hundred thousand tons.

Look, look! A sight magnificent! How beautif'ly she runs!

The land is on the port side and is on the starboard, too.

What distance, then? What is the gap allowed between the two?

Why, several hundred feet, Sir! It is wider than the ship!

What could go wrong? What query could be on the pilot's lip?

What is the room for error? Very little, that's for sure.

There's substantial room for terror that she'll end up on the shore.

The ship, d'you see, is longer than the gap allowed for passage.

Some might suggest some caution, speed reduction and some massage.

Some balance of the risks involved. Some due evaluation.

Some call for recognition of the laws of navigation.

Stoutly hearted, on she goes! She's slimmer than the gap!

This needle's eye is useful in the global trading map.

To question calls of commerce is a question quite banal

When called upon to navigate a purpose-built canal.

On, on she goes at thirteen knots, and such a graceful speed.

Here is mankind's magnificence and lunacy and greed.

On, on she goes and happily. Misfortune then arises.

Expect the unexpected, as you should, to meet surprises.

A sudden sheer, for cause unknown, has caught the vessel yet,

And part of her is stuck and dry which should be clear and wet.

And how long will it take to free her, grounded at both ends?

Why, that is for the salvors. What d'you make of it, my friends?

BY

29.03.2021

The NOBLE awards for COVID-19 behaviour 2020 to 2021

Everybody will be aware of the internationally renowned NOBEL prizes that are awarded for exceptional achievement in many fields. Nobody will have heard about the NOBLE awards about to be instigated for categories of behaviour encountered during the past year of COVID.

I am sure all will have encountered behaviour that has occurred during the COVID panic that signifies a different approach to life as a result of it.

In some sectors COVID is used as an excuse for inefficient, or just simply bloody minded behaviour. However there have been many positive experiences where companies or individuals have gone out of their way to be kind or helpful.

I intend to award NOBLE awards to those nominating exceptional behaviour in the following categories:

- 1) Best Company.
- 2) An individual who has gone out of their way to be helpful/Acts of COVID related kindness.
- 3) Worst company/Best excuse for not providing a service/Sheer bloody mindedness.

The awards will be given to those individuals whom submit the most convincing entries and each winner will be offered a box of chocolates made by my personal “individual” choice of helpfulness, Jan at Fredricks Chocolates in the Marlands Shopping Centre, Southampton!

John Noble

23rd March 2021

*Your entries should be submitted to the Editor: editor@cachalots.org.uk by **Friday 14th May**.*

You may nominate in any or all of the categories but please explain your reasons.

They will be judged by a panel of three: the Captain, the Boatsteerer and Past Captain John Noble himself, and the winners will be announced in the June edition on 31st May.

Remember, this is a light hearted competition and we are not looking to be sued by irate nominees. Names may have to be changed to protect the not so innocent.



An Italian job

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 772 February 26th 2021

By Michael Grey

Whatever your particular mode of transport might be, you are well advised not to have any sort of accident within the jurisdiction of the state of Italy. An advanced European country, you might think, with a well-developed system of justice? That may be the impression everyone who loves that country likes to think, but just don't make any sort of a mistake in Italian waters, if you don't want to end up serving a custodial sentence.

This view has been recently reinforced by the treatment accorded to five members of the crew of the cruise ship *MSC Opera*, which, it might be recalled, had a spectacular "hard landing" in 2019, trying to get alongside in the port of Venice. Terrifying videos were instantly available from several angles, showing people running for their lives on the quay as the ship, apparently out of control, bounced off the wharf and slammed into a harbour cruise craft. Five people were injured in the general mayhem.

The initial explanation was of a "technical problem", but such malfunctions did not save the master of the ship from a five month gaol sentence, with the ship's chief engineer and the chief electrician being given two months apiece. Two others were found to be at fault and were given ten days gaol time.

The rationale behind these sentences, as revealed by the court, were that there were indeed problems aboard the ship as she approached the port, but that the accused pressed on with their intention to berth, when they perhaps should have held off until it was perfectly safe to proceed. The company, which backed its on-board team, maintained that the technical problem was just that, and the fault lay with the people responsible for the equipment.

Custodial sentences in such a situation might seem very harsh. It was possibly influenced by the location of the incident, and the timing, as it coincided with a tremendous effort by people in Venice to get big cruise ships banned from the lagoon. It also has to be borne in mind that unlike some places that have a system where the cause of an accident is investigated by independent marine professionals, in Italy the investigation

is merely part of a judicial process – in effect a trial, where any professionals play only an advisory role.

Italy is just one of many countries that have elected to maintain such a system, and shows no reluctance to commit to prison those deemed to have been responsible for marine accidents. There have been a number of such occasions in recent years. Maybe one should not be judgemental in such matters, but it might reasonably be asked what might be served by the criminalising of professionals who have made a mistake, lapse of judgement, or merely have been overtaken by circumstances.

In such cases a complete lay person will surely find the technical complexities that might be extenuating completely mystifying. This is increasingly the case when advanced automation systems effectively relegate the ship's technical staff to bystanders. The handling of big ships in very confined waters, such a non-professional judge may well conclude, will surely be no more challenging than parking a car.

Italy might have form in this respect, but maybe we should not hold its systems as unduly harsh. Indeed, it might be suggested that the determination of blame, rather than causation, has become entrenched throughout the whole world and that accidents which would once have been dealt with by professional investigation now increasingly involve law enforcement. The enforcers in most of these places are also now armed with a host of useful catch-all charges that can be deployed, such as “hazarding a ship”, to suit the situation in a wide range of circumstances. They are surely giving effect to something of a societal change that has seen growing intolerance to any sort of “accident” – a word that has ceased to have much meaning.

Will marine professionals be less inclined to any form of error, if they know that it carries with it the risk of a custodial sentence, to satisfy the public demand for somebody to be “held to account” for his or her actions? And in an age when these marine professionals are being asked, overtly or covertly by managements, to shave safety margins, to handle bigger and bigger ships in more fraught circumstances, with prudence and caution being regarded as outmoded, shouldn't we cut them a bit of slack?

Master criminals

Many articles on autonomous ships have appeared in these pages over the past couple of years.

I think the Covid pandemic will have concentrated shipowners' and managers' minds even more on how to rid themselves of pesky seafarers.

Not only do they need to be fed, watered, serviced and kept dry and warm but they demand to be paid as well. And now they and their families, supported by various ill-informed do-gooders, are voicing concerns when it proves inconvenient to relieve them after 11... 15... 18... 24 months.

Masters, shorn of their powers in command but overloaded with responsibilities, can look forward to ending their careers not safely docked, but in the dock for sundry misdemeanours totally beyond their control.

After years of training and experience they can end up with a criminal record for failing to personally check thousands of cargo lashings or allowing gas emissions to exceed the current port's ever changing regulations, or for that unfortunate oil spill caused by the inattention of over-tired crew while bunkering. Meanwhile, those who should shoulder much of the responsibility for such transgressions are happy to let the master be their scapegoat.

And there's the rub! Nowadays, somebody must be found to be at fault for every accident, incident or Act of God and if there is no master onboard to take the blame when things go awry then the focus of the investigators will turn on those pulling the strings or pressing the buttons in the Remote Operating Centre. Or, heaven forbid, on those financing and profiting from such systems.

I think I have come up with an answer.

Instead of serving years at sea and ending up with a criminal record, why not do it the other way round? Start with a criminal and let them serve out their time at sea. There must be hundreds of prisoners languishing in solitary or with long sentences still ahead of them that would jump at the chance of being captain of a ship for a spell in order to earn their liberty. They could have a smart uniform with gold braid up to their elbows and fancy epaulettes like a South American Admiral, not to mention a Disneyfied cap with lots of scrambled egg round the peak.

Their accommodation could be a totally self contained, lift-on lift-off self-righting safety pod, strategically positioned so as to auto- release in the event of

an emergency. It would be fitted out with all the latest mod cons and gizmos so essential to living today. And locked, of course.

Once the vessel is remotely berthed in port the locked Containerised Escape/Living Lifeboat (CELL) could be lifted off and placed somewhere on the quay (shore leave) and the master could dispense, through a secure hatch, the obligatory cartons of cigarettes and bottles of scotch to the visiting port officials without the need for them to actually board the ship. On completion of all cargo work the master could sign the necessary paper work, through the secure hatch again, and the CELL could be lifted back on board for the next leg of the voyage.

After a spell of say, 9 months, in accommodation and conditions which would be thought to be luxurious to many modern day seafarers, the master would be released and considered to have paid his/her debt to society.

In the unfortunate, and statistically improbable, case of the aforesaid accident/incident they would be dragged off to the nearest court and, as the only person on board and therefore obviously the guilty one, be fined (owners to pay) or sentenced to another round trip.

Even as I write this, another master is being set up to be in the frame for 'causing an obstruction' as canal authorities decide that there may be a human element in the latest debacle. Bet your bottom dollar that it won't be any of their humans at fault for barrelling ULCV s along a narrow waterway in a 13 knot convoy.

And, no doubt, minds will now be even more focused on how to move giant container vessels through the canal autonomously.

Terry Clark 1st April 2021

The views expressed in this article do not necessarily reflect those of The Cachalots. They may not even reflect those of the author himself who has admitted to going a bit stir crazy himself. He thinks that you would be foolish to believe anything you read, especially today.



Sadness is not enough

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 773 March 12th 2021

By Michael Grey

“The crew change crisis is disappointing and sad” wrote IMC’s Group MD for Shipping Frederik Guttormsen in the latest BIMCO Bulletin. He suggested that it showed a lack of co-operative spirit and demonstrated that the industry, and the world in general, were not very good at finding global solutions to problems that no one country, or industry, could properly address.

A few hours after reading this I heard a BBC World Service news item about the plight of more than one hundred seafarers from Kiribati, who had been stuck in Hamburg in a hostel, some for more than a year. You might think that with this number all wishing to go home to the same place, it would not have been beyond the wit of any person to reunite them with their families. But the problem was not the lack of transport to this Pacific archipelago, but the fact that their home country had been Covid-free and the inhabitants wanted to keep it that way. These things are often more complicated than meets the eye.

You might suggest that throughout the past few hundred years those islands had suffered enough from unwanted imports and their caution was understandable. It is not that different from the policies of both Australia and New Zealand, two countries completely dependent upon shipping to carry their trade, but keeping ships’ crews at arms’ length. The 40,000 Australians caught abroad but who cannot get home, like the crews of the ships, are regarded as collateral damage, although they seem to have made exceptions for international sports players, which to many people seems pretty outrageous.

But it serves to underline Mr Guttormsen’s view that while we universally suffer from the pandemic, the strategies employed to deal with it are anything but global. There have been plenty of good intentions expressed by nation states and institutions alike, but when it comes to translating them into practical solutions to the crew change problem, there

are very few places where innovative “Singapore” – type strategies are being followed. We are told that everyone is working “tirelessly” behind the scenes to devise till solutions, but month succeeds month and there are still no answers as to how internationally travelling seafarers can be vaccinated, or why they still have to jump through huge hoops to get home, or re-join a ship.

It is crises such as Covid-19 that emphasises the fact that the shipping industry remains hugely fragmented, although if nations cannot work more co-operatively, it is a bit much expecting co-ordination from shipping. But there is a failure of governments in general to grasp the seriousness of the situation. The ships still come and go; the goods are delivered and shipped, so what is the problem?

Would it be so desperately difficult to identify strategically placed crew-change hubs upon which ship operators could depend? What prevents a degree of inter-company co-operation, that could, for instance, see them getting together and chartering ferries or small cruise ships (there are still some which haven’t been scrapped) to serve as mobile quarantine hotels and transport between hubs and ports where crews could congregate.

Couldn’t owners and managers, along with charterers, be able to put together such crew delivery systems, and encourage states and ports to co-operate in something so worthwhile? And why would it not be possible, even allowing for the predictable screams of shippers, to finance such schemes with a small surcharge on freight? It would surely be better than remaining disappointed and sad, among all the good intentions.

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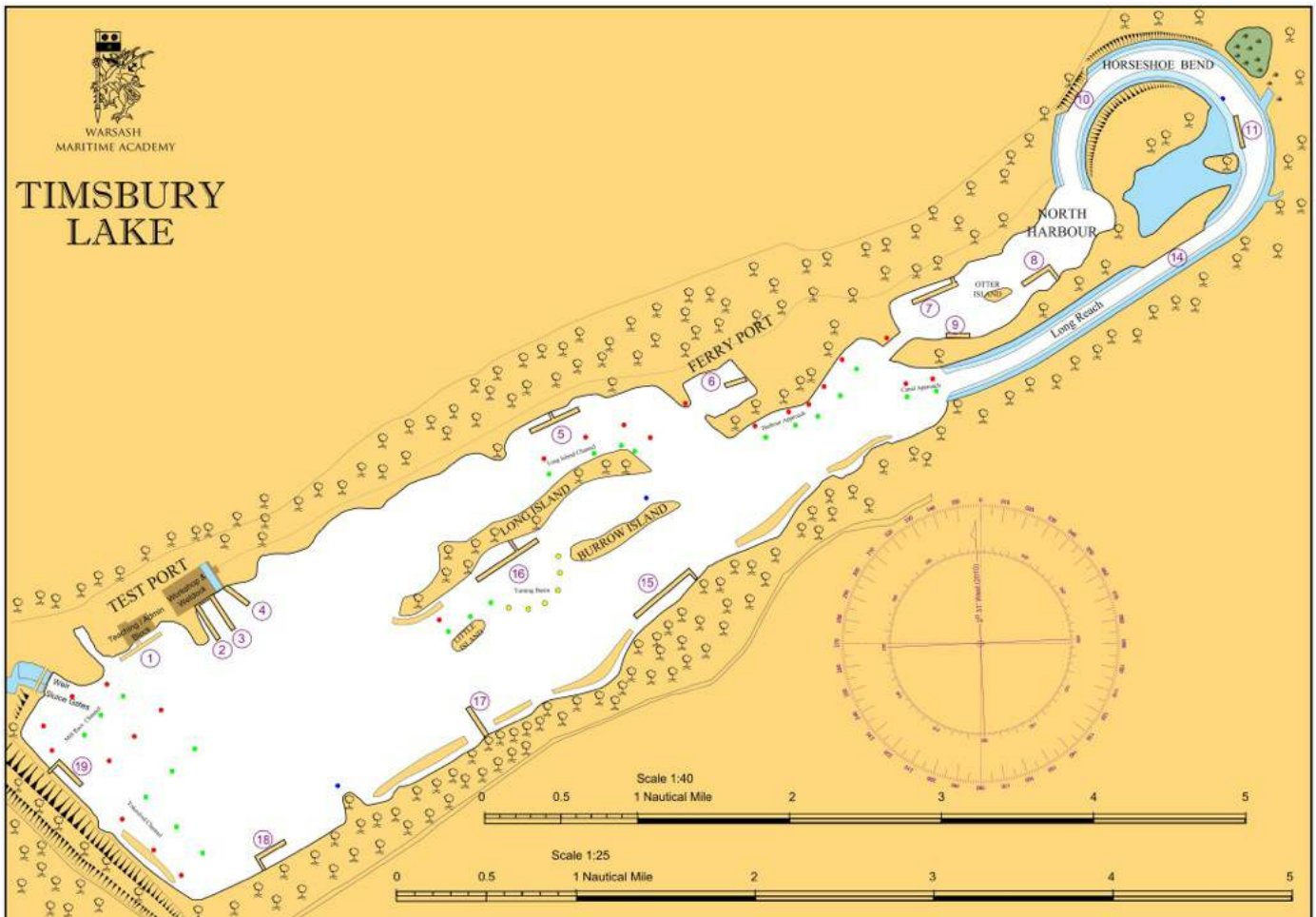


Timsbury Lake

Cachalot Nigel Allen, a retired Southampton pilot, explains his connection with model boats.

Located about 2 miles north of Romsey, this lake was purchased in 2008 to replace Marchwood Lake as a centre for the Warsash Scaled Manned Model Ship facility.

The lease at Marchwood Lake was due to expire in 2011. The university hired consultants who found some other lakes to lease but none of them were front runners. Aware of this, when I saw an advert in the Romsey Advertiser (May 2007) indicating a lake for sale, I chased it up and discovered Timsbury Lake was for sale! We quickly realised that this lake was far superior than any other lakes that we'd looked at. The University subsequently bought the site before the 2008 economic meltdown and spent £2.7M developing the site, which was opened in 2011.



Timsbury Lake includes the surrounding land and trees. This allowed for a long term view, so permanent classrooms and a boathouse were built. (In contrast, Marchwood had some tatty Portacabins and a very small boathouse) A lot of the experience gained at Marchwood went into how Timsbury Lake was developed. The new lake at Timsbury was rebranded as 'The Shiphhandling Centre'.

We have a fleet of ship models representing different ship types and scales and also some radio controlled tugs. Three of the models are twin screw, something that Timsbury specialises in. There are a variety of berthing scenarios around the lake, buoyed channels and a canal for passing and overtaking manoeuvres.



Most models are 1/25th whereby 10 knots of real life speed is 2 knots on the lake due to the scaling effects. Time is 5 times faster, so more manoeuvres can be achieved than in real time. Distance wise the lake is approx. 400m x 100m which represents (x25) 10km x 2.5km. The interesting bit is that the wind is 5 times stronger, so a well sheltered environment is needed to keep things practical and realistic. Hence,



ownership of the surrounding mature trees helps us to control the effect of the wind.

I found out about Marchwood Lake Scaled Manned Model

training centre in 1990 when one of my deep sea colleagues was training there as part of becoming a London (PLA) Pilot. Strangely, I met him for a beer on the Wednesday evening (3 days into his course) and he could explain ship handling in terms that I could understand, hence I badgered the then Southampton Harbour Master and eventually John Mileusnic and I attended the course in late 1991 just prior to becoming 1st Class. All Southampton Pilots now do this training early on in their career and recently some are now doing refresher courses too.

I started working part time at Marchwood Lake in 1998 and as part of their training (40 days at the Lake) I did the course again and found it extremely rewarding, as it built on my understanding from my 1st course in 1991 and the experience gained in between. Another Southampton pilot retired early from pilotage and started at the Lake at the same time. At that time, Warsash was part of Southampton Institute and was morphed into Solent University in 2006.

Other Southampton Pilots have also worked there and some still do- such as Cachalot Bill Hargreaves.

Some pilotage districts follow an IMPA recommendation to do Manned Model courses every 5 years. The course fee is currently around £7000 for a 5 day course. There's a Melbourne (Port Phillip) and an Alaska Pilot that have done the course 6 times! The Lake operates from March to November and has a throughput of typically 200 clients each year.

As you might guess, I've met many Pilots from around the world during my 22 years at the lake.

Initially, the course was designed for Ship Masters following the growth in large ship sizes, however over the years the vast majority of clients attending Timsbury are now Pilots and more recently Super Yacht Captains are becoming regular clients too.



As you can see from the picture below, the models can accommodate at least two clients seated, such that the Captains eyes are roughly where the bridge is located and affords the correct perspective. Normally the two clients switch roles after each manoeuvre. Watching someone else is a very good teaching tool. (Look closely as there's a familiar face in that model)

Typically each course features stopping, turning, slow speed control, manoeuvres with anchors, passing and overtaking in a canal, numerous berthings and tug assist.

Most attendees repeatedly say 'This is the best course that I've ever done!'

Nigel Allen FNI



Letters to the Editor

Reminiscences from a past Messmate

I was introduced to the Club in 1973 by a very old friend, Roger Porter, a former P & O Purser, who was a Messmate. I had spent some 19 years in The Bank Line's Hong Kong offices, and a further 5 years with Wallem & Company in Singapore; when I returned home, Roger and I renewed contact and together we set up a catering company. At the time, Royal Mail House was our lunch-time watering-hole.

Known, inevitably, as 'the two Rogers', we were asked if we could organise a variety of functions for the Club. In particular, at the time the Club's principal annual occasion was a lunch on board a passenger ship in port. The Sea Pie Supper was then a less formal affair and over three successive years we catered for it at the School of Navigation, Warsash. I believe that with the subsequent demise of passenger liner services leading to the lack of suitable ships, the annual lunch disappeared and the Sea Pie Supper became the principal, and much grander, occasion.

By virtue of an association with the operators the 'Belle' pleasure-boats from Bournemouth Pier, we were able to arrange several outings on the solent, for Club members and their families. 1977 was the Queen's Jubilee Year, and a trip round to view the assembled Review Fleet was the first of these. In 1982 we went out to watch the finish of the 'Tall-Ships' race, and then in 1987 the 'First Fleet Reenactment' voyage to Australia started from Southampton. Before the start, the Fleet passed in review before the Queen and Prince Philip on board 'Britannia', whilst the Red Arrows made a very impressive fly-past. (Hearing the two of us muttering about all the strings we had had to pull, almost convinced the Boatsteerer that we had laid it on specially for the benefit of the Club!). On the evening before the start of the Whitbread Round-The-World Yacht Race in 1989, we had a run round to look at all the yachts as they got ready for the next day. All these excursions, of course, featured a bar and appropriate comestibles!.

These memories are still fresh. May I wish The Cachalots continuing success in their endeavours; I look forward to reading all about it.

Roger Needell

Captain Reg Kelso's article in Cachalot 86 on the British Apprentices Club generated the following exchanges:

Much enjoyed Reg's piece on the British Apprentices Club in NY. I went there on my first visit to the city in about 1957, when it was still going strong and they were wonderfully hospitable to us. We were taken to Radio City and up the Empire State building and had a tremendous time in what was an amazing place to half-starved, rationed Brits.

Michael Grey

I liked your article on the British apprentices club, in New York.
Brought back fond memories.

Although by the time I was regularly calling New York, I was a junior officer, and attending the British Officers' club, at the King George Hotel.

The girls were great there but the hostesses at the Apprentices' were noted everywhere for their outstanding beauty.

Like you, I expect you knew several colleagues who met their future wives at the two clubs.

I recollect coasting a ship in Europe when the second mate's wife, when entering the saloon for breakfast was extremely startled to see the 2nd Engineer sitting at the table, as she had formerly been engaged to him, when she was at the New York club.

I remember being rather unpopular at one stage, on the 'Ulysses', as we had a musical quartet, and when asked to perform at the George Hotel, I, alone, refused, knowing the phenomenal standard of music in New York.

I had actually met Miles Davis the night before in a pub in Greenwich Village., and Peggy Lee two weeks before at the Copa-Cabana.

Oh Happy days !

Ken Owen

Reg Kelso responded:

Yes – the BAC girls were truly gorgeous but they were older than us and “controlled” us rigidlya goodnight kiss was all one could hope for – or got !! I fell for Allison on my first call in NY in May 1946 and this lasted till my last voyage as a Cadet -1949 – We were in NY for about five days every five months and she (and her driver) were waiting on the quay as we docked !! Daddy was a stockbroker and they lived in a huge mansion upstate in NY where I was regally entertained. We kept in touch for some five years thereafter ..and she invited me to her wedding !!

I did not go back to New York until I was 2nd Officer cargoshipand she and hubby collected me from the ship, took me home and threw a party.

The Officers Club was then in The Hotel Astor and the BAC had closed down.

WE were truly blessed to serve at sea when we did – and to be employed by caring and considerate employers. Even today – some 33 years after retirement ..the Cayzer family still keep in touch and express an interest in the welfare of their ex employees.



Captain Ken



Another contribution from Ken Owen which appeared in his local Mellor Church Parish magazine "Outlook" of March 2021.

Another of the many disappointments resulting from the current pandemic lockdown, is the cancelation of the annual Remembrance service, normally held at Norbury Church, Hazel Grove, for the wartime Convoy rescue ship, s.s. 'Stockport'.

As many *Outlook* readers will know', the 'Stockport' was a former North Sea railway company ferry, requisitioned by the Admiralty, as a rescue ship, following on, behind a convoy, in order to save crew members from torpedoed ships.



After saving more lives than any of the other rescue ships, she was tragically sunk by a u-boat herself, with loss of her entire crew, totalling 64 souls.

The Hazel Grove branch of the Royal Naval Association, together with the British Legion, have done a magnificent job, organising the Remembrance parades. For many many years, I have been privileged to be associated with them.

On the day of the Service, we always used to fly the Red Ensign at half mast, from Norbury church tower. It was particularly prominent from there, as it was seen so well by all the A6 road traffic.

I felt very sad when, like so many other churches, when the flag pole became damaged, it was decided, for safety reasons, not to renew or repair it. And thus discontinue flying a flag from the tower.

When you compare the risk, with those taken by the rescue ship 'Stockport', you feel rather humble.

Outlook readers may know of the permanent memorial, arranged with Stockport Borough Council in July 2019.



This consists of Railings, with informative plaques attached, situated between Knightsbridge and the bank of the river Mersey, in central Stockport.

They are beautifully crafted by Tim Ward of the Art Workers Guild. It is well worth visiting, or else, viewing, on line.

<https://www.geograph.org.uk/snippet/19160>

I was only eight years old when the tragedy of the ‘Stockport sinking’ took place, but clearly remember an assembly, at Ludworth Primary School where I sat on an indoor window sill in an overcrowded class room, and joined in singing the hymn ‘Eternal Father’.

I remember especially singing ‘Oh hear us when we cry to thee, for those in peril, on the sea.’

Because I had recently seen a war photograph of ship-wrecked seamen covered in oil, as they clung to an upturned lifeboat, I assumed, from the hymn, that this escaped bunker oil which covered the sea surface, must be called ‘peril’.

It is only now, when I recall this occasion, that I remember, that a supply teacher, a Mrs Seaton, taking part in the hymn singing, had only recently, lost her naval husband, when enemy action, sank our greatest battleship, H.M.S. ‘Hood’.

He was one of the 1,413 who were lost and only three survived the tragedy.

This does tend to put our current difficulties into perspective.



A slow boat to China

In 1957 the Blue Funnel liner Phemius was 31 years old. Launched as Alcinous under the Dutch flag she had been built for the pilgrim trade and at one time she carried as many as 1,200 pilgrims from Malaya and the East to Mecca. She was transferred to Ocean Fleets British flag in 1950 and renamed after the previous ship of that name which had been torpedoed and sunk in December '43 Her Voyage 72 was set to be another round trip to the Far East but fate had a different destiny in store for her.

Past Captain (1991) Ian Thomson was 4th Mate and wrote this account of the voyage for the Blue Funnel magazine.

I joined the ship on 23.02.57 in Hamburg on Voyage 71 coastwise, relieving Ian Drummond as 4/O. We were both completing our indentures by sailing as uncertificated 4th Mate. Captain Claude Goodman also joined there to relieve Captain Jasper Brown, who was only coasting, having already retired. Each morning, they greeted each other at breakfast by saying 'good morning senior master' to which the reply was 'good morning junior master! Jasper Brown entertained us by recalling his days in sail when crew members would buy for 1/6d a new 'donkey's breakfast (straw mattress) before each voyage.

We loaded at Hamburg, departing on 22.03.57 for Glasgow and Birkenhead before sailing on 6.04.57 on voyage 72 for the Far East. The Suez Canal was closed and our first port was to be Dakar for fuel oil. We encountered heavy weather In the Bay and were pitching heavily. One night I was awoken by the ship vibrating violently, and then the engines stopped. My first thought was that we had shed a propeller blade but when I went on watch at 0400 I learned that the crankshaft of the port engine had broken, with the bed plate cracked in several places and other major damage. The third engineer had been narrowly missed by hot flying metal piercing the crank case doors and was in some shock.

We thought this would mean returning home but instructions were soon received from India Buildings to 'proceed on voyage'. All Blue Funnel outward bound ships would 'shepherd' us for about 3 days whilst overtaking



Phemius in Dakar, 17 April 1957

us, in case a tow was necessary. After Dakar (17-18.04.57) and rounding the Cape we headed for Durban up the coast against the strong Agulhas current. It was a very slow passage at about 3 or 4 knots over the ground. We had to call at Durban for fuel oil but some joker had posted on the notice board that it was necessary to call for 'fuel oil and dart flights'. We were in Durban from 12-15.05.57 for maintenance to the remaining engine.

On leaving Durban we had a 24 day passage to Penang during which I had my 21st birthday. For that day, the baker had made a splendid birthday cake and the carpenter had made a large wooden key, both well decorated. When I



A coming of age celebration

was on watch, the old man appeared on the bridge and said '4/O, you had better go below and start the party as I am going to keep this watch!' I naturally obeyed and he joined us after the watch.

Joe Duggan (Electrician) was a natural entertainer and decided, with the old man's approval, that he would rig loud speakers on deck before reaching the coast. This enabled the broadcast of the popular song at the time, "Shake, Rattle and Roll"¹ to be played to the ships we passed whilst we entered port carrying our permanent NUC (not under command) signal, two black balls by day and two red lights by night.

In Penang we commenced discharge and stayed for two days. Then on to Port Swettenham for eleven days, and Singapore for eighteen days,



Phemius on the moorings at Port Swettenham, June '57, being passed by the outward *Idomeneus*. Also on the moorings, astern of the *Phemius*, can be glimpsed the *Melampus*, another of Blue Funnel's 'woodbine funnel' ships. She went to the breakers in Scotland at the end of that trip in Oct. '57 while the *Idomeneus* carried on until 1962.

Each time another Blue Funnel ship arrived in port we lost all our labour to them as we had the lowest priority. In Singapore there were daily visits from the mates of other Blue Funnel ships to beg borrow or steal deck stores that they all knew were now surplus to our requirements.

Before leaving Singapore we held a party for the nursing staff of a local hospital. The boat deck was decorated with bunting and coloured lights and officers from our other ships were invited. Towards the end of the evening, Claude asked the senior sister whether they had a piano in the nurses' home. She said they hadn't, to which he replied "my dear, you shall have ours'. She said they couldn't possibly get it from Keppel Harbour to the hospital but she was told to send an ambulance to the ship in the morning. With that the bosun got the piano slung, lifted over the side and into the back of the ambulance which then sped through the dock gate with its bell ringing!

We left Singapore on 11.07.57 bound for Goh Sichang where we anchored for five days to discharge cargo for Bangkok. Then on to Hong Kong, arriving at Holt's Wharf on 27.07.57.



Officers on 29 July '57, Ian Thomson top right

...Three days later Phemius was towed to the ships' graveyard at Laichikok where she was broken up and made into steel building bars... After such a happy voyage, an air of sadness prevailed as we transferred from the ship to the YMCA to await a flight home. The old man and chief were housed next door in the Peninsular Hotel but came to visit us to ensure we were comfortable.

We flew in a turbo prop BOAC Bristol Britannia, known as the 'whispering giant' and the route was Bangkok, Rangoon, Calcutta, Delhi, Karachi, Beirut Zurich, London. It took two days, as we broke down en route and had to spend the night in the Ashoka Hotel in New Delhi. On arrival at Heathrow we walked into a Nissen hut where we cleared Immigration and Customs, then found our way home.

Needless to say, several souvenirs off the ship found their way



Dave Eves David Howel Paul L. Cocc Ian Thomson

home. One I have is an AH house flag, seen flying from the mast of my shared boat in 2007 when four AH middies from the 1950's gathered in Yarmouth, IOW, for dinner together, illustrating the Ocean Nestorian Association motto, "Friendship Through Service".

Frightened by ferries

The Maritime *Advocate* online Issue 774 March 21st 2021

What on earth are we to think about the British Prime Minister's great idea about a fixed link across the Irish Sea? It started off as a bridge, but seems to have been transformed into a tunnel, possibly when some expert suggested that the former could be closed by high winds for about 100 days every year. A couple of eminent civil engineers and a world leading expert on buses are currently investigating the possibilities, despite the suggestions of sceptics that it was likely to go the same way as Boris Island which threatened to block up the River Thames with a new estuarial airport and the ill-fated Garden Bridge, which disappeared, possibly eaten by slugs.

Fanciful drawings of such a tunnel in a daily newspaper showed a design for a "floating" structure, to circumvent the problem of the huge trench which runs up and down St George's Channel and which is stuffed with rotting explosives from two world wars. Tethered to the sea bottom by stout cables, the structure appears desperately vulnerable to passing nuclear submarines, while the problem of some of the most powerful tidal streams around these isles seems to have eluded the impressionable artists.

It is, we understand, a Norwegian design, although this might be confusion arising from a similarly improbable scheme to build a "ship-tunnel" between two fjords to avoid some stormy offshore waters. The costs would be stupendous and scarcely worth mentioning, as any estimates would be hugely multiplied, as are those of all such projects. And if it ever got built you could guarantee that the Scottish government would demand all the revenues from the tolls and there would be nothing left for the wretched majority of taxpayers on either island, who paid for the thing.

But why ever bother with such a nonsensical scheme? There has never been a time (if we forget about the pandemic and the insane NI Protocol) when travelling between Great Britain and Ireland has been easier and more convenient. There have never been more routes, offering bigger, better and more luxurious ships for both passengers and freight. Beautiful new ships have been built at no cost whatever to the taxpayers of the five countries served and there is amazing choice available. Why would anyone of sound mind prejudice the prosperity of more than half a dozen such ferry routes, by attempting to funnel all the traffic through a fixed link between the North of Ireland and Scotland?


Ferries are flexible, above all else and can be added and subtracted,

or moved elsewhere, to cope with shifts in traffic with amazing speed. If anyone doubts this, within days of the EU's multiplication of trade procedures, imposed in their post Brexit petulance, ferry operators had commissioned new direct routes between the Republic and the Continent. And when it hopefully settles down again, it might be expected that these ships will return to shorter routes and better revenue-earning prospects. Ferry schedules alter with seasons too, which makes maintenance easier.

It isn't as if Boris is short of "shovel-ready" projects that can employ lots of concrete and civil engineers, steelworkers and builders of every trade and description. There is a National Grid close to meltdown and incapable of coping with the green, all-electric future. There are power stations to build, windfarms to plant in every available sea. A sensible scheme for transferring surplus water from the soaking parts of the UK to the dry bits, along with some new reservoirs, is essential. The road and rail network badly need modernising, with more useful links than HS2 between regional cities.

Why is Boris so ignorant about ferries and their manifold advantages? It is probably unfair to single him out in this respect because virtually all politicians and most of the mandarinates involved in transport policy wouldn't be able to distinguish a ferry from a fruit juice carrier. They understand roads and trains and have all travelled on aeroplanes, but the delights and opportunities from ferries leave them ignorant and bewildered. It is conceivable that Boris, when a correspondent in Brussels, was once unable to fly to his destination and was seriously sea-sick in a Channel storm on the awful Ostend boats that used to be run by the Belgian government, being henceforth frightened and repulsed by the prospect of sea-travel.

I can recall my first experience on a rickety ferry out of Liverpool in the 1960s, in a storm off the Welsh coast, clinging to the 1st Class bar and listening to crashes and screams coming from elsewhere in the labouring ship. "Don't worry Sorr", said the Irish barman as he refilled my whisky glass – "it's just the Third class passengers fighting". But times change and if Boris, before he commits serious money to daft fixed links, takes a trip on a beautiful huge new Stena ship out of the Mersey on his next Stormont visit, he will see the pointlessness of such projects.

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

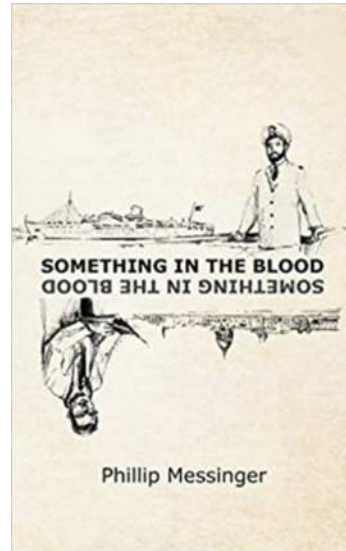
What I've been reading

SOMETHING IN THE BLOOD

Cachalot Phillip Messinger has written this, what he describes as a truth based narrative and is classified elsewhere under 'Adventure Fiction'.

It draws heavily on his own MN experiences, from Worcester to Master of world-wide trading Chemical Tankers.

An exciting read, it is also satisfying to a fellow mariner that the nautical content is technically accurate rather than over dramatised.



Published by Authorhouse UK, ISBN - 978166558781, in soft cover of 122 pages, it is available through Waterstones or Amazon who also do a Kindle version.

Several of Phillip's contributions have appeared in these pages and can be accessed by clicking on the blue links:

Cachalot 60: [Under the Sun](#) Cachalot 61: [Did anyone order a pizza](#)

Cachalot 69: [Worcester Memories](#) He has also written a book of poetry

[Reflections on Life](#) which was featured in Cachalot 70.

New Members

John Everett rejoins us after a short spell away. No other information at this time.

Keith Pletschke is a Master Mariner with an MSc in Shipping Operations who now works locally as Marine Standards Manager with Svitzers. He is an active member of the Society of Master Mariners in Capetown and of the HCMM in London and also belongs to the NI, IMarEST and IIMS. He would like to be locally involved as well.

Ann Cara Till is another re-joiner who returns following a relocation to Southampton. She is a Master Mariner also with an MSc in Shipping Operations and a Diploma in Port management and also belongs to the HCMM, NI, IMarEST and WISTA. She works as Chief Vessel Operator for Ocean Infinity, who specialise in remote controlled and autonomous vessel operations. Until her return to the UK she was active with the Society of Master Mariners in Capetown and now lives locally with Keith, above.

Head winds



Baird Maritime Workboat World, Grey Power April 2021

There is no doubt about the way the wind is blowing when it comes to “sustainable” power and a coastal state which has no plans for offshore wind farms is becoming quite a rarity these days. There is also no argument about the attitude of the authorities when applications for these often extensive arrays arrive on their desks – they will be treated with all seriousness and other “sea users” will be told that wind developments will be prioritised.

There is no mystery about why the needs of fishing communities, shipping and even those who object to their sea view being spoiled, are being elbowed aside by the authorities. The wind farmers will be revenue providers in terms of the sale of “rights” by governments while answering the growing demand for greener energy. For littoral states which would otherwise gain little or nothing from those previously using the sea, it is a win-win situation. So it will be fishermen who will be barred from sea areas that they have previously worked and ship operators who might express their concern about diversions around these extensive arrays of offshore turbines will be hard pressed to make their case.

In some respect the attitude of the authorities to the needs of these newer users of the coastal seas resemble that which obtained when the exploitation of offshore hydrocarbons in areas such as the North Sea became feasible in the 1960s. Coastal states with offshore oil or gas prospects let it be known that nothing was going to be permitted to obstruct the plans of the developers. Wide exclusion zones were to be created to protect the drillers

with heavy penalties to deter those who objected to divert from their traditional routes. The pipelines that connected up the offshore wells and brought the oil or gas to shore were also given fierce legal protection from the unwary anchor or trawl boards.

“All around these developments will be found cautions about the risk of anchoring, dredging or fishing.”

It was all an excellent precedent for the procedures that would be put in place for the siting and management of offshore wind turbines. Once again, government needs and political priorities would dictate action and those of the sustainable energy sector would trump anything else.

Initially, other interests, whether those of fishers or dredgers or of shipping would be considered, and it was sometimes the case that the developers could be persuaded to perhaps shift the position of a proposed turbine so to give a bit more clearance to an established shipping route. But increasingly, as the quest for offshore gigawatts has heated up, the needs of other users of the sea have been squeezed to accommodate those of the sustainable energy producers.

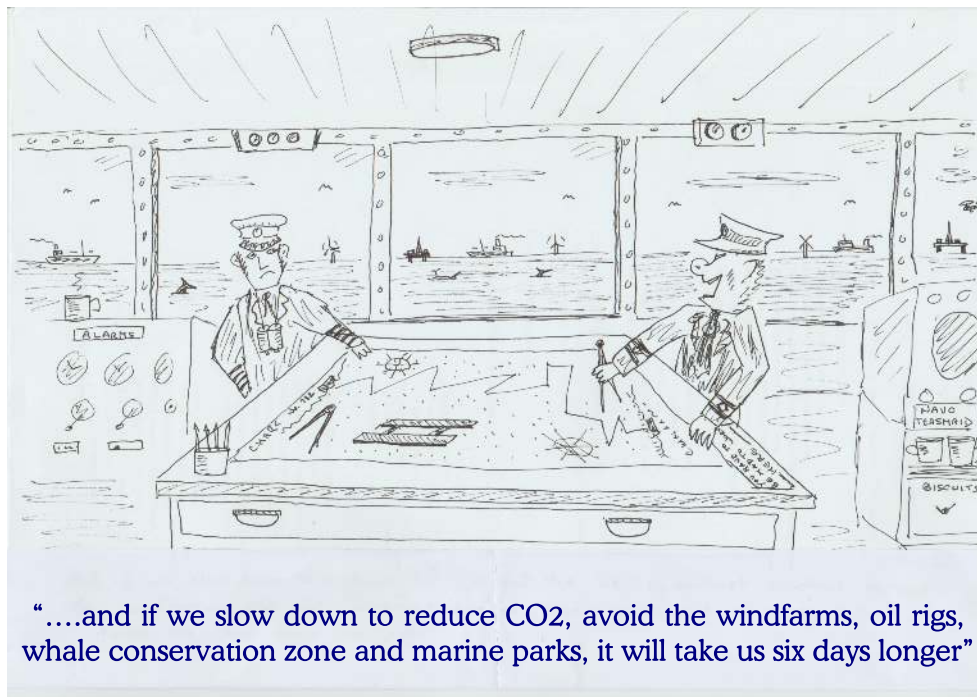
As an example it is worth looking at a chart of the German Bight, where routes in and out of the principal North Sea ports are increasingly constrained by encroaching wind farm protected zones. An elderly mariner made the comparison with the same sea area immediately after WW2, when vessels using routes across the North Sea would be required to use swept channels between the minefields that remained a menace for several years after the conflict had ended. The coasts of the Baltic are also increasingly barred to shipping and fishing as a result of the spread of wind farms. And all around these developments will be found cautions about the risk of anchoring, dredging or fishing, with an extensive network of undersea cables connecting the windfarms to the shore electricity grids.

Offshore wind, which does not attract the level of objection invariably generated by proposals for shore-side turbines, seems certain to increase. It is aided by the economics of volume production and ever-improving technology. The newest turbines generate more power than their predecessors and the development of sophisticated equipment to “plant” them, mean that arrays can be commissioned faster. There are systems for establishing windfarms in waters previously thought too deep or difficult

and viable systems for floating turbines that will operate in water depths in which the only constraint will be the mooring system and the arrangement for bringing the power onshore.

“As an industry that will pick up the skills offloaded by a declining offshore oil and gas sector, there is no mystery about offshore wind’s popularity with governments.”

The latest boost to the offshore wind industry is its future role in providing electricity for the production of green power sources like hydrogen, rather than feeding into domestic grids. A recent energy commentator referred to this next phase as “massive”. It is why the growth of offshore wind is inexorable and unstoppable, why ports are competing furiously to attract those involved in turbine building and installation and the service of offshore fields. As an industry that will pick up the skills offloaded by a declining offshore oil and gas sector, there is no mystery about its popularity with governments. As for the traditional users of the sea, they will just have to adapt to changing priorities and share the waters with newer inhabitants with whom they must learn to live.



A bit of hyperbole in the cartoon above perhaps, but it is the way the wind is blowing.

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Cachalot Michael Grey. rjmgrey@dircon.co.uk



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 thirty-two members.

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.

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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 April 2021

250 Club

The 250 Club draws were resumed in December, the draws taking place at the last Zoom meeting of the month.

March Margaret Grant D P Neaves

February L R Morris D P Neaves

Reminder

Members are reminded that some subs and 250 Club contributions are overdue and the distribution list will be amended accordingly.