

# The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 92

September 2021

## Cachalot Catchup

This issue, number 92, is the first printed edition of *The Cachalot* since issue 75 of March 2020. Those members who are not online or who have not given us their email addresses may well wonder what happened to 76 - 91. We have, in fact, been producing what I call a 'digital edition' which has been sent out monthly to all those members and other interested parties who are on the email distribution list. It is designed to be reader friendly for those reading it on a screen, with a larger print size, shorter line lengths and greater space between lines. This makes for much more white space, which is easier on the eye but just the opposite to what we want on a printed page where space is at a premium. The result is that the onscreen version takes up to 36 pages compared to the 12 or 16 of the printed one. Not a problem until one wishes to print it out to read it while seated in your favourite armchair. To that end a 'printer friendly' version was produced as well, squeezing the text and graphics back to near 16 pages, but not up to the production standards of the previously quarterly printed editions. It should really have been called 'paper friendly' because it will only have saved members paper, not the most costly part of the printing process, the ink.

Your editor was pleasantly surprised that he found enough copy to produce a monthly digital edition when he had previously struggled to fill the pages of the printed quarterly one. Much of the extra input is down to Cachalot Michael Grey who, having 'retired' from Lloyds List, continues to write regular columns for maritime publications such as *Seatrade-Maritime*, *Baird Maritime*, *Ship & Offshore Repair Journal* and the *Maritime Advocate*. He, and they, were gracious enough to allow us to include his pieces in our humble magazine and this edition is no exception. The result is that we have been able to produce a near up to the minute newsletter containing contributions from one of the most well respected commentators in the maritime industry. It has been well received, not just here but in other parts of the world too.

We also have a new regular column, "Captain Ken", from Ken Owen who writes his articles for his local Mellor Church Parish magazine and allows me to reproduce them here.

It is now the intention to produce a printed quarterly edition of *The Cachalot* much as before, with interim digital editions at the end of each intervening month. The printed copy will be sent to those members not on the email list and to other selected interested parties. Also to any member who prefers a printed copy. Several members, in response to our note in

the last newsletter, have already expressed their preference, yea or nay, and, if you have not already done so you may do so through me, the editor, or through the office. All members on the email distribution list will continue to receive a pdf copy of the printed newsletter, i.e. a facsimile copy, not one specifically produced for reading on screen. They will also receive the digital interim ones, which will be screen friendly.

So, what can we tell those members who were cast adrift and unable to read any signals, as it were, when the rest of us were confined to our cabins?

With the onset of the first lockdown all club activities came to a halt and we had no access to the shared office at the Royal British Legion Club, nor to our paper records or the club computer and the files therein. Our Past Storekeeper, Barry Peck, had made some backups of some of the most vital files on his home computer but there was no realistic way of continuing with a working office. Richard James, the Office Administrator, was put on furlough, as was Liz behind the bar.

Early in the lockdown Past Captain John Noble suggested we hold a writing competition on:

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

The Captain, Boatsteerer and Storekeeper were the judges and without fear nor favour, but with great discernment, chose the entry of yours truly as the winning one. The prize was a bottle of the finest Malt whisky, generously donated by John, but I have had to wait over a year to receive it. Now I can't bring myself to broach it, with seemingly little to celebrate at the moment. Even the end of the second lockdown seems to be dragging on a bit with people reluctant to drop their masks or venture out.

My entry was called "Tits up" and you will have to read Cachalot 80 to find out why. But I am in the position to re-inflict the first paragraph on you.

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

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

And I don't think much has changed since then.

Informal Zoom meetings were instigated in August, on Friday mornings at 1100, and became quite successful, attracting members who would never have got to the Club. Usually around a dozen members but we have had up to 20. True to say that some have yet to learn that only one person can speak at a time, much like the simplex vhf radio channels that we must all have used....over. But we try and keep it informal and don't bang the gavel much.

**W**hen there was some sort of relaxation last summer/autumn and it was thought there might be a return to the RBL, a recce of the office revealed that the club computer, perhaps in sympathy with some of the members, had not endured the lockdown well. With the office locked up for months with no heating or ventilation, damp had got into its valves or whatever and it had gone into a sulk. Barry sprayed some money at it and it came round enough to be sent off to Richard's house for some shielding of its own, not working, just resting...and waiting.

**T**he management committee, with the aid of Zoom, managed to convene at the required intervals and keep Club business ticking over. The Past Captains met on Zoom in early January and decided that as Andrew Moll hadn't really had much of a voyage in his year as Captain, being tied up alongside for most of it, then he should be re-appointed as Captain for a further year. Staff Captain Ken Edwards stood aside for personal reasons and Martin Phipps MBE was chosen in his stead.

These appointments were ratified at the AGM five days later, which was also held on Zoom with a virtual attendance of 37, many more than have physically attended the AGMs for some years.

Ken Dagnall MBE relinquished the helm (or would that be the telegraph) after eight years as Boatsteerer to Robin Plumley MBE. Also standing down, after ten years as Functions Officer, was Peter Grant, replaced by John Noble. The rest of the committee remained the same.

Since then, what can we report? Not a lot it seems. Burns Night, the Sea Pie Supper and the annual Skittles Night at the Southampton Old Bowling Club were all cancelled, as were the Curry Lunches at Kuti's. A return to Kuti's is now scheduled for the 28th August and is well supported but that will probably have happened by the time you read this.

As previously advised by the Boatsteerer, we returned to the Club room on the 23rd July, Richard having already re-installed the recalcitrant computer after its R&R.

**T**he monthly 250 Club draw was an early casualty of the pandemic but we were able to reinstate it in December with the numbers being drawn at the home of Richard James by his wife Jill and the results relayed live by phone to those at the Friday Zoom meeting.

Subscriptions for the missing months have been carried forward and the draw has now reverted to being held on the last Friday of the month in the Clubroom.

On Friday, the 30th July, Boatsteerer Robin offered the bag of numbers to Liz, as the only lady present (no woke gender politics here). The first number out belonged to, who else... Robin! The second number had not been allocated and a re-draw produced a number belonging to his daughter Melissa! All above board and witnessed by every member in the room. Well, all two of them anyway.

**You've got to be in it to win it**, quipped Robin (Hint). A list of the winners since December can be found in the box on the notice board (centre pages)

The annual Shipping Festival Service at Winchester Cathedral was cancelled for the second year running but we have organised a Merchant Navy Day Service at St. Michael's Church, Southampton, on **Friday 3rd September**, (see the notice board, centre pages). We are asking all Cachalots to support us in this new event.

The Trafalgar Dinner has also been abandoned for the second year but we are determined to go ahead with the **Sea Pie Supper on Friday 4th February 2022**. A contract has been made with St. May's Stadium and we have had a positive response from those members and corporate bodies that usually attend. We aim to keep the ticket prices at 2020 levels. (See the notice board, centre pages).

Terry Clark, Editor

Due to unforeseen circumstances we were unable to bring you the Captain's Log for this edition.



## Boatsteerer's Locker

**A**t the time of going to press we will have had four gatherings at the Club room at the RBL. At this stage we have not been overwhelmed with members but quite understandable as people find their feet and level of confidence in getting out and about. Nonetheless, it has been wonderful to meet up with members in person and swing the lamp as before.

I am still running a Zoom gathering on a Thursday although there was only Terry and me on the 5th August!!! Provided I can get a signal and open Zoom on my mobile if I am away (golf), I can connect whoever appears first to act as Host for any others that appear. We will keep this running for the time being and review in late September to consider if it is worth continuing.

This edition of a 'hard copy' Cachalot is the first since March last year and our Editor has provided a background and status of the Cachalot elsewhere, along with an excellent summary of what has happened, or not, during the 'time of Covid'.

**250 Club** – the next draw will be held on Friday 27th August in the Club room. Results will be in the next edition of the digital Cachalot. You may have noted the Plumley name come up twice in the July draw!! I have a lot of tickets and I remember other members who managed to appear as a winner quite often. Hence, I say, in the words of a former BBC game show, 'You have to be in it to win it'!!! As a reminder, the following is extracted from the Cachalot website.

### **HOW THE "250" CLUB HELPS TO SECURE OUR FUTURE.**

THE INCOME OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB IS HAVING DIFFICULTY KEEPING PACE WITH ESSENTIAL EXPENDITURE – DOES THAT SOUND FAMILIAR?

Several years ago we introduced a system of a voluntary additional payment (with the inducement of a prize) so that those who can afford to pay a little more will do so and those who cannot need not.

THE IDEA OF THIS "250" CLUB WAS SUGGESTED BY THE LATE CAPTAIN WILLIAM ("ROBBIE") ROBERTSON WHO HAD USED IT TO GOOD EFFECT WITHIN ANOTHER ORGANISATION.

THE CONCEPT IS SIMPLE AND HERE IS HOW IT WORKS.

Each £5.00 you contribute gives you 2 chances, every month for 12 months, to win one of the £40 monthly prizes (£100 in December); there are two prizes each month.

The odds on your winning are a great deal better than

the Lottery and your contribution will help the Club to meet its financial obligations.

Please consider "increasing" your subscription by subscribing annually to the "250" Club.

Make your cheque payable to "The Cachalots", write "250 Club" on the back, or pay by bank transfer and we will do the rest – and

GOOD LUCK.

### INTERNET BANKING

For any payments to the Club

Payment details are:

Sort Code: 56-00-68

Account Number: 00037869

Account full name: Southampton Master Mariners' Club (The Cachalots)

(NB This may appear on the screen truncated to "Soton Master Marin" or even "Southampton..." However, we have had reports that the full name appears on some bank websites.)

Please enter an appropriate reference such as name and 250 Club so that Richard knows what the payment is for.

### **Merchant Navy Day Service – 1830 Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021**

Hopefully, you will have seen the flyer in the last digital Cachalot (now pinned to the notice board on the centre pages), or received an invitation by snail mail if you do not have an email address, for this service. It will be very helpful if you can send a confirmation to me if you wish to attend and the name of a partner if you are bringing one.

**Your support is requested for this new event.**

### **Cachalots Golf Day – Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021**

Our golf day has now attracted 35 entries from a wide range of maritime organisations around Southampton and we look forward to a splendid day of golf at Lee-on-the-Solent Golf Club.

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE  
Boatsteerer  
[boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk)

## No fuel like an old fuel



Michael Grey

The shipping industry's march towards a zero-carbon future is gradually increasing its pace, and against a background of environmental activism, is unlikely to slow down, even if it wanted to. The great Glasgow enviro-fest scheduled for the end of the year will be unsparing of any 'special case' treatment

for shipping, with its activists already proposing a slew of measures that will go far and beyond anything that might feature on IMO's list of practical steps that would not seriously damage world trade. Green politics, in an age now dominated by agendas dictated by teenagers and millennial activists, are becoming mainstream and gradualism is unfashionable. And whatever practical engineers might suggest, it won't ever be enough – environmental interests will always want more, and faster.

All of which makes life extraordinarily hard for anyone who might be considering serious investment in new tonnage. Against such uncertainties, how might you work out how on earth such ships should be propelled and how they might be fuelled? These will be ships that if ordered today and delivered two years from now, could be still trading a quarter of a century from now. Will they be permitted, in a climate which is already proposing the outlawing of gas fired domestic boilers within a decade and making it illegal (or at least impractical) to sell diesel or petrol fuelled vehicles?

The green zealots who are forcing governments down this road don't care about practical difficulties and the interests of the shipping industry, which they believe is significant only by virtue of its role as a polluter, will be brushed aside. We can probably forget the traditional 'grandfather' clauses to protect the economics of existing ships – the activists are now working on the financiers and users of shipping to ramp up their objections to the 'old and polluting', no matter how many useful years it might have in it.

The giant corporates, which shift vast quantities of goods around the world, earn valuable public relations Brownie-points when they insist that their transportation is greener than green and that they won't charter ships that don't match this colour. It is, for them cheap, and burnishes their reputation. 'Zero carbon!' – bellow the demonstrators – "When do we want it – now!" And regrettably, this is the message that is resonating with the political class – this is where the votes are to be mined.

Does the owner contemplating a newbuilding programme hold fire, and see what emerges from COP 26 after the dust has died down and the 40,000 delegates have jetted off from Glasgow to their home countries (their emissions suitably offset, of course)? Does such an owner look around the market, and opt for ships that have incorporated in their design as many possibilities for different fuel options and are replete with the best current thinking on sustainability? Does an owner just hope for the best and buy what is cheapest, following tradition, in the knowledge that such a ship may lose any value it has, with years of usage in it, as the greens accelerate their demands?

Does the owner join the growing number programming LNG into their future thinking, considering its not unreasonable cost, a spreading worldwide infrastructure and the fact that it actually has been proven to work?

But then that owner also has to consider the possible downside in the army of nay-sayers who say LNG, while clean-ish, does nothing in the long term for the environment and is, at best, just a 'bridging' fuel. This is the message that resonates where green activists gather together. It doesn't help the cause of LNG that the World Bank (whatever its technical credentials might be) has issued a decidedly negative report about its use, despite some record ordering of LNG-fuelled tonnage.

It is interesting that pretty well all the new fuels attempting to make their mark have associations and organisations representing their interests and promulgating their supposed advantages. So there is no shortage of advice, although how objective it might be will be open to question. This is probably just as well as there never seems to be any shortage of activists keen to emphasise the negative aspects of any proposal. LNG, Methanol, Ammonia and Hydrogen all have keen supporters, while scarcely a day goes by without an enthusiastic message from the International Windship Association, urging us all to stop being so 'fuel-centric' in our thinking.

There is no real argument – wind is the one energy source powering ships that doesn't have environmental activists demanding that it is stopped in its tracks. It may be a long shot for our owner looking for newbuilding solutions, but there are already all manner of amazing designs for wind assisted ships. This itself places the owner in a desperate conundrum, as worries pile in about the advantages of rotors over fixed wing sails, whether aerofoils (as proved by America Cup yachts) are a better prospect than a 21st century derivation of the sails on Chinese junks, or whether to go for an enormous kite.



## Not a yacht

It is probably true that rejoicing is mixed with scepticism over an announcement from the British government that tenders for a 'sort of replacement' for the Royal Yacht Britannia will be called for in the near future. The ship, more a 'Sea Force One' than a yacht will be ready for service in 2025, although experience has demonstrated that this is perhaps an aspiration than a firm delivery date.

The ship will be employed for trade promotion purposes and as a floating location for diplomacy. It is reported that it will be crewed by the Royal Navy, which may cause Admirals some concern, as naval seafarers are in short supply at present.

It seems to be a very different proposal to a current and very practical plan for a multi-role ship that would have combined an ability to provide aid in emergencies such as weather events, with an important training mission for seafarers. Details of the government plan remain sketchy, but it would appear that 'showing the flag' might have assumed a greater importance in post Brexit Britain than 'hearts and minds' and a pragmatic need to provide sea time to future generations.

There is probably plenty of time for endless argument about where the ship will be built, if the delays over the RFA's solid store ships to supply the carrier force are anything to go by. After hawing about whether tenders should be 'international', then delays about the proportion of domestic content in the ships, the MoD has required the tendering process to begin again. Endlessly kicking the ball down the road doesn't sit too comfortably with Sir John Parker's proposals to have a smooth stream of orders keeping what shipyard capacity remains in the UK reasonably active. But it puts off the day when the ships have to be paid for, which may be the government's rationale.

Meanwhile the HMS Queen Elizabeth task force is off to the Far East, assisted by the ageing RFA Fort Victoria, which optimists hope will be eventually replaced by the new ships. It is worth perhaps remembering the

Canadian problems which were caused when one of their two fleet auxiliaries was wrecked by a fire, causing all sorts of chaos in naval circles and the conversion of a container ship, in double quick time and the value of always having something in reserve.

## Posher paint

Keen students of the marine coatings world will have been interested to learn that the 'posh people's paint company' Farrow and Ball has been acquired by that aristocrat of the paint world Hempel. Hitherto in the hands of a hedge fund, the British brand, which has made something of a reputation in the country-house set where they don't mind paying £90.00 for a small pot of paint, now finds itself owned by a Danish firm that has been making marine coatings for more than a century.

I still have a small volume on anti-fouling written by Hempel's Iver Lunn in 1974, which is admittedly a bit out of date, but full of fascinating historical facts, involving 'breaming' and 'careening' and about how the dreaded teredo worm and barnacles could be dealt with in the 16th century.

It is a curious acquisition for Hempel and may well lead to questions about whether it will be possible in the future to purchase anti-fouling which is the colour of 'dead salmon'. Maybe you could paint your hatchcovers in the startling shade of 'pale hound'. F&B has made something of a reputation in the strange names it chooses for what might otherwise appear to be a readily identifiable colour of its adventurously priced coatings.

We have come a long way since a question I was asked in my Mates' orals about how to mix your own paint from various cheap constituents. There were still Tyneside tramps which made their paint in such a fashion, when Mr Farrow and Mr Ball started out making their paint in the 1940s. Poshness came later.

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**Ship & Offshore Repair Journal, Dockgate Column,  
June-July 2021 and the author Cachalot Michael Grey**



An artist's impression of the new 'Royal Yacht'

*This appeared in the November edition, #82. Again, you may well ask what has changed since then.*

*At a dinner, held in London in October '20, for a select few maritime professionals, Past Captain John Noble's friend and colleague John Lillie recited his latest poem, to much acclaim from those present.*

## THE YEAR OF THE PESTILENCE

(The operation was a success, but the patient died)

'There'll be five-hundred-thousand British dead', they said.  
Professors, each with shiny-brow and pointy-head.  
'Just stay indoors, in bed or dead', they said.  
'Or else we'll hunt you down with drones instead'.

So, we stayed indoors for many a day and week.  
No grandchild hugged. No kiss on velvet cheek.  
Old folks abandoned, dying in their bed.  
The healthy left with broken heart instead.

'Applaud the sainted NHS each week', they said.  
'Envy of the world they are!', they said and said.  
But they count the corpses nightly, eyes agleam;  
Foretelling Armageddon 'til we want to scream.

Then the NHS reverts to life before.  
Nurses chat and text 'til thumbs are sore.  
While oldies die neglected. Bedpans never brought:  
'We've got degrees you know; but caring? We were never taught'.

Surgeries have closed and GPs all have fled.  
Your piles they'll view online on zoom instead.  
'Just hold your arse up nearer to the light'.  
With wrinkled nose they tell you it's alright - such shite.

Teachers close their schools too fearful now to teach.  
And unions seize their lockdown chance to preach.  
No furlough for these public servant types  
Paid for doing naught but carp and gripe.

And Cummings? Was he a paedo or a Russian spy?  
'No, he went to Barnard Castle and he told a lie'.  
Oh! Lying is nothing, but Barnard Castle?  
Hanging's too good for the filthy Tory rascal.

'There'll be five-hundred-thousand British dead', they said.  
Boffins, each with shiny-brow and pointy-head.  
When dodgy science rules we've lost our way  
And future generations are the ones who'll pay.

John Lillie 2020

# Asleep at the wheel

**The Maritime Advocate online Issue 783 July 30th 2021**

By Michael Grey

The results of an inquest in the UK on the deaths caused by a tram coming off the rails gave one pause for thought. The driver, it had concluded, had suffered a “microsleep” at the very moment he should have been applying the brakes and the tram had rushed on with fatal results. The verdict, it is fair to say, has been widely criticised, not least by the relatives of the dead and injured, along with others who pointed out that falling asleep at the wheel of a speeding vehicle invariably leads to criminal convictions in the event of an accident.

It might also be asked whether this momentary lack of alertness, in any moving vehicle, aircraft or ship is caused because the driver, pilot, or officer of the watch lacks sufficient stimulation to keep their mind on the job. It must be almost impossible to tell whether a person has briefly nodded off, or has become so bored that the mind has wandered.

Years ago Dr Martin Dyer-Smith, who had been a senior ship’s officer before retraining as an industrial psychologist, was commissioned by the Maritime & Coastguard Agency to undertake some research into the effects of fatigue. This was particularly important at that time, because there was a great deal of enthusiasm for One Man Bridge Operation, in which there would be no need for a lookout to be stationed alongside the OOW during the hours of darkness. The Norwegians, I recall, who retain their fetish about minimum manning, I recall were very gung-ho on the idea.


Martin undertook a number of voyages on short-sea ships and as a result came to important conclusions about the wisdom of OMBO and its numerous risks, along with the insidious and cumulative effects of sleep deprivation, particularly on officers working watch and watch. I recall his report of a case where, lurking in the back of a wheelhouse, he had passed his hand over the open eyes of the watchkeeper, who failed to even notice this, even as he had signally failed to react to the lights of a ship on a steady starboard bearing. The officer, concluded Martin, had been in a “catatonic trance” – something we probably all have experienced at some stage, as your thoughts take you miles away from where you really ought to be at a given moment.

Decades later and we still are getting no nearer to any conclusive action that might sort out this problem once and for all. The latest concern, which has rather taken over from the disconnect between a human and machinery is “distraction”, and there is now a growing archive of accidents which have been attributed to this cause. This is somewhat different; rather than boredom or sleepiness, it is alarms going off, essential paperwork, endless communications or too many things happening at once for the available hands, that diverts the watchkeeper from the navigational task.

But as we address this issue, we should not forget the older problems raised by the lack of stimulation, boredom, sleepiness and equipment that it is difficult to deny has taken a great deal of the challenge out of the watchkeeper’s role. If people are bored witless, shouldn’t we recognise the dangers and try and do something about it?

They might have been introduced with the best of intentions, by clever equipment manufacturers anxious to sell things, but SatNav, AIS, clever computing radar and other gear that reduced the watchkeeper to a mere overseer of machinery, successfully managed to de-skill the human component, without replacing any of the stimuli required for alertness. And it is still going on unchecked – the messages are perhaps more subtle than “buy our amazing navigational system, it can be worked by idiots” - but the inference is the same. And now, rather than confronting the problem and putting a bit more interest and challenge into the task, we are actually talking about ships with nobody mostly on the bridge or at the machinery controls during a deep sea passage, leaving it to clever sensors to pick up any approaching dangers.

Then, I suppose, some bored watchkeeper, awakened from their slumbers like Rip Van Winkle, by alarms, or electric shocks, will stumble to the bridge or engine room, and do what is necessary, if they can remember what that is.

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**Merchant Navy Day Service**  
**Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> September 2021 at 1900**  
**St. Michael's Church, Southampton**



Dear Cachalot,

Firstly, I apologise for the seemingly late appearance of this invitation, but due to Covid-19, we have only just recently been able to commence discussions with St. Michael's Church.

Our Club Captain, Andrew Moll is delighted to invite you and your spouse or partner to join us to celebrate **Merchant Navy Day** in a service at St. Michael's Church in central Southampton.

This service in no way attempts to replicate the annual Shipping Festival Service held at Winchester and hence will be reduced in terms of numbers of attendees and ceremony due to constraints on space and socially distancing protocols.

Civic dignitaries including the Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, High Sheriff of Hampshire, the Mayor and Sheriff of Southampton have been invited along with representatives from organisations associated with Southampton.

The service will commence at 1900 but there will be no parade of flag parties beforehand.

We are advised by St. Michael's that unless there is a significant change in social distancing rules, we will all be expected to use the hand sanitizer provided and record contact information, or use the QR Code, as you enter the church. The seating arrangements will allow for social distancing which means the numbers we can cater for will be limited.

To assist us determine the seating plan, we would be grateful if you would provide the names of your spouse or partner, if you wish them to accompany you, at the soonest opportunity. We can then draw up most of the required contact list beforehand and enable speedier access.

Yours faithfully,

Captain Robin Plumley MBE  
Boatsteerer  
The Cachalots

All communications to be addressed to:

Email: [office@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:office@cachalots.org.uk)  
[boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk)



The annual Merchant Navy Memorial service, which is organised by the Solent Branch of the Merchant Navy Association and held at Holyrood Church, Southampton, will take place at

**12 noon on Sunday the 5th of September.**

The Mayor of Southampton will be in attendance and Captain Andrew Moll will be laying the usual wreath on behalf of the SMMC. Standard bearers will assemble by 11.30 and the Mayor will arrive at 11.45.



## New Member

**Thomas Weise** is a Senior Master, High Speed, with Red Funnel.

He is also a member of the Nautical Institute and of the Royal Institute of Navigation.

He joins us to network and socialise with like minded members.

## Sea Pie Supper

**Friday 4th February 2022**

**St. Mary's Stadium**

We intend to go ahead with the next Sea Pie Supper in February and have had a positive initial response from those members and corporate bodies that usually attend.

We hope to keep the ticket prices as before:

**£53** for members, **£65** for guests

and tickets will go on sale, to members only, on a first come, first served basis, in mid-November.

We will keep you posted

The cut-off date for the next edition will be  
**24th September 2021**

## New Cachalots

Members we have welcomed to the Club since March 2020.

**W J M Hargreaves**

**M L Savaria**

**T Cummins**

**J R Everett**

**K Pletschke**

**A C Till**

**S J Parker**

**T Weise**

## **250 Club**

Dec	R C Plumley	Victoria Yelland
(£100)		
Jan	C D G Driver	J M M Noble
Feb	L R Morris	D P Neaves
Mar	Margaret Grant	D P Neaves
Apr	K T V Edwards	D F Gates
May	R C Plumley	M Tilbury
June	A E Bloor	M R Donaghy
July	R C Plumley	Melissa Plumley



# The Belgian solution

**The Maritime Advocate online Issue 784 August 14th 2021**

**By Michael Grey**

We have more than a million of the world's most essential workers, whose labours have been absolutely essential during this pandemic, but they have the utmost difficulty in getting vaccinated. They are, of course, seafarers, whose itinerant lifestyles mean that they are seldom in one country for any length of time. They are also foreigners, which means that it does not appear to any government other than their own, that their health or vaccination status is anything to do with them. And most of the time, they spend their lives over the horizon, and effectively invisible, except when they are found to be Covid positive and everyone wants them to go away.

For the whole length of the pandemic, the treatment of the world's seafarers has been shameful. Crews have been forced to remain at work far beyond the end of their contracts, denied shore leave or any relief, while those who might have relieved them have remained at home, mostly unpaid. The arrival of the vaccine "cavalry", as Boris Johnson called this medical miracle, offered a solution that might have done something to mitigate the grim life of the seafarer. But just as the pandemic itself seemed to bring out in the worst in bureaucratic obstacle building, while everyone wants and needs what seafarers carry aboard their ships, the vaccination of this vital international workforce has proved a problem best passed down the line.


The emergence of new variants of the virus have magnified the apparent problems, while the need for specific vaccines to be approved, not just by those dishing it out, but in the ports or airports which seafarers might pass through, has been a major complication. It has not helped that the majority of the international workforce are residents of countries well down the food chain in terms of resources, and that most work aboard open register ships, which almost certainly don't stay in port long enough for two jabs to be given.

There have been some bright spots in this catalogue of unfeeling gloom, which has seen the seafaring workforce treated like lepers in many countries, with ships, in some notable and shameful cases, not even permitted to land their dead. Cyprus, which has a sizeable fleet manned almost entirely by non-Cypriots, has offered vaccines to anyone aboard a Cyprus flag ship. Some parts of the US, where there is a range of approved vaccines on hand, have made them readily available to all seafarers, regardless of their nationality.

And since the end of last month, in an excellent case of thinking outside the box, Belgium has commissioned "roving" vaccination teams to provide the one-jab Johnson & Johnson vaccine to all seafarers using their ports. This is an important advance in thinking, with the Royal Belgian Shipowners' Association acting on a proposal by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for the North Sea, along with the Directorate of Shipping. It is a big deal, if you think of the "throughput" of seafarers aboard ships passing through ports the size of Antwerp and Zeebrugge. And with a single dose vaccine, it is arguable that one problem has been halved, at a stroke.

One must only hope that this example of innovation and leadership, quickens the pulse of other administrations that depend so much upon the labours of seafarers and shows that solutions are perfectly possible, given the will and application of resources. The scheme not only applies to seafarers aboard ships in Belgian ports, but also those who might be joining or leaving ships docked in Belgium.

The Belgian model might also serve to shame some developed and well-resourced countries which depend completely upon shipping for their exports and imports. It has probably taken a certain amount of courage, to embark on a scheme that effectively takes responsibility for something that everyone else tended to put in the "too-hard" basket, and for the benefit of non-nationals. But it is apparent that seafarers have suffered long enough in this pandemic, with large numbers of them turning their back on a career that offers little other than exclusion from society and ill-treatment. Some clever folk in Belgium might have done something that is both practical and humane and goes some way to redress the balance.

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## Captain Ken

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

*Ken lives in the Derbyshire Peak District and has been writing about some of his sea going experiences for the Magazine, so his stories are not particularly aimed at maritime folk.*

*"Outlook" is an excellent Parish magazine, It can be read online at <https://mellorchurch.org/outlook-magazine/>*

During my time at sea, I was always fascinated by the Portuguese man of war jelly fish. There were so many stories of them causing fatal injuries. So you can imagine my concern when on a voyage across the North Pacific Ocean some 35 years ago, we found ourselves sailing through a massive shoal of them. The shoal was so huge that it took five days to steam through before we were clear of it.

The Met Office used to publish a quarterly magazine, called The Marine Observer, and the following article was included in the magazine dated April, 1996.

North Pacific Ocean m.v. Main Express Captain K Owen. Kaohsiung to Oakland.

Observers. the Master, J Dixon. 1st Officer, R Walker, 2nd Officer. R. Walker. 3rd Officer.

12- 15 May 1985. Whilst on passage, sightings of numerous 'Men-of-War', were an every day occurrence". At first sighting, what appeared to be a patch of discoloured water, approximately 15 m, by 30 m, was seen. this was a yellow greenish colour, and looked to be smooth, as though a film of oil was on the surface. As the vessel closed on this patch it could be seen that it was a shoal of 'Men-of-War' (which we subsequently decided were Velella ) so dense that no water could be seen between them. Similar sightings took place all day, and in the afternoon, long wind blown streaks of yellowy green, could be seen stretching for thousands of metres, consisting of million upon millions of organisms.

On closer inspection from the main deck, the colour of the patches was the same, but when the vessel passed through a patch and scattered individual bubbles the usual deep could be seen around the clear bubble. The average size was about 4-5 cm but varied greatly as there were such vast amounts.

The following day, these observations took on a different appearance. Vast numbers were still seen, but were not observed as discoloured patches as it was now overcast, whereas the previous day had been sunny. It was assumed that the diffusion of light through the millions of bubbles was responsible for the yellowy green appearance.

We travelled through the Velella for five days, by which time they had thinned out considerably from the solid patches observed on the 12th and 13th, but they were still visible in large numbers.

We had covered over 2,000 nautical miles since the first sightings on the 10th and were constantly intrigued as to how far this solid mass stretched.

A specimen, small in size unfortunately (originally packed in a container of spirit which was smashed and replaced with one containing gin) was obtained.

Whilst the colour of the Velella was originally an azure blue, it changed to a brown/yellow colour shortly after immersion in the gin. It was oval in shape, and measured about 2cm by 1cm. Beneath the raft were short tentacles surrounding a central mouth. There was a clear sail, roughly triangular in shape, set at an angle across the raft. The sail was about 2cm high and 2cm wide across the oval. Also visible when viewed from above was a series of concentric rings.

Position of ship 38 deg 00' N 179deg 54'W

Dr F Evans of the Dove Marine Laboratory, University of Newcastle on Tyne comments:

The specimen included with this report was the skeletal remains of Velella velella, or 'By-the-wind-sailor' confirming the shipboard identification in the best possible way, by the forwarding of the actual animal. I have never seen a report of such truly astronomical numbers, and find it quite awe-inspiring.

The intense blue is characteristic of many animals that live right at the surface in warmer seas, presumably a camouflage. Polewards such animals may appear greener. In the case of Velella, this blue colour appears to be soluble in alcohol, hence the decolourisation when immersed in gin!

Velella is an animal whose anatomy and so on is very well known, but whose life history is not. We even lack even knowledge of how long it lives, whether it is a few months or many years.

May I point out once more that without the Voluntary Observing Fleet, this immense outburst could well have gone unnoticed.



*Velella-velella, the by-the-wind sailor*

## Cachalots and Messmates

*In 1973, Commodore D.M. MacLean D.S.C. R.D. R.N.R., who had been Captain of the Club in 1965, wrote "A Brief History of the Southampton Master Mariners' Club". In an occasional series we shall bring you extracts from that volume to remind us of the history of our unique club. The first four chapters have already appeared in previous digital editions of The Cachalot. Here is Chapter 5 which is perhaps apposite considering the cancellation of the past two Shipping Festival Services there, due to the pandemic.*

### CLUB'S AFFINITY WITH WINCHESTER CATHEDRAL



Always eager to advance the Club's spiritual as well as its secular dignity, the Founder members conceived the idea of seeking a closer connection between Winchester Cathedral and the Port of Southampton, on the solid ground that our Lord's first disciples were fishermen, thus seamen.

After a commendable period of good staff work between the Club's Church Committee and the Cathedral Dean suggesting that they would feel honoured if the Bishop would accept the conferment of the title of "Honorary Stowaway" upon him, His Lordship signified his acquiescence. And thus Dr. Theodore Wood, Bishop of Winchester, became the Club's first "Stowaway", remaining a keenly interested friend of the Club until his much-lamented death a few years later.

The Club's first official Divine Service was held at All Saints Church, Southampton on Trafalgar Day (21st October) 1928, and the Lord Bishop of Winchester was the Preacher.

As the attendance of members and the public at these Church Services grew it was decided to move the venue to Winchester Cathedral, and soon the Service became well-known as the Winchester Shipping Festival Service. These Cathedral Services, held annually in the summer, are duly impressive and have continued almost without a break since 1931.

Colourful and deeply moving, these Services are always fully attended by all branches of the shipping community and nautical training establishments in the area. For the kith and kin of the shipping fraternity these services have become one of the landmarks of the Cachalots' year. On these occasions, the Club's ensign together with the house-flags of all the Southampton-based Shipping Lines are paraded and then reverently carried into the Cathedral and laid on the Sanctuary steps at the beginning of the Service.

This is followed by a dignified procession in full uniform of the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Commander-in-Chief Portsmouth, the Mayor and civic dignitaries of the neighbouring towns, the Captain of the Club, Lord Bishop of Winchester and lesser Clergy and others. As they move slowly down the nave with becoming solemnity towards the Chancel the great organ gently fills the ancient Cathedral with music.



*Colour Guard of Cadets from Warsash School of Navigation approaching the West Gate of Winchester Cathedral for the Annual Shipping Festival Service. The House-flags of all the shipping companies using the Port of Southampton are customarily carried at the service.*





*The Bishop of Winchester, the Dean The Very Rev. Dr. E. G. Selwyn, together with the Mayor of Southampton, Alderman R. E. Edmunds, greet parade leaders at the Shipping Service in Winchester Cathedral, June 1955. The Club, at the suggestion of Dr. Theodore Wood (our first "Stowaway" and an earlier Bishop of Winchester), initiated this service. Club Captain H. J. Pellow in the background.*

A Shipmaster from a vessel in the Port of Southampton usually reads the Lesson.

The Cathedral has witnessed many an impressive Service but perhaps none more so than on the occasion when, just before the commencement of the last War, the Club presented it with a magnificent silk Red Ensign as representing the colours of the Merchant Navy, and to be laid up in the same manner as the Colours of locally-domiciled regiments are laid up. This handsome flag was made of heavy silk by the wives of four Founder Cachalots. These ladies were Mrs. Clarke, Mrs. Rayner, Mrs. Saunders and Mrs. Wolfe.

In the course of the June 1969 Cathedral Shipping Festival Service at Winchester, the Club presented the Dean with the last Red Ensign flown by the Cunard liner-*QUEEN ELIZABETH* -the last of that aristocratic breed.

Often whipped by the sharp winds of the North Atlantic, the *LIZZIE'S* old ensign now hangs quietly in the shadows high up by the West door of the Cathedral.

In the summer of 1935 there was another memorable occasion when the Cunard Company, on paying-off the original *MAURETANIA*, presented an exquisitely-wrought model of the ship to the Cathedral where it remained on display in the Crypt with some other old-time ship models for many years.

The Shipping Festival Services at Winchester, usually held in mid-summer, have for many people acquired a nostalgic quality. The colourful pageantry and the deep solemnity of the actual Divine Service make a lasting impression-and at its conclusion there is always the pleasant prospect of a stroll through the colourful Deanery gardens with old Club-mates, while the Band of the Royal Marines plays a lively selection of popular airs.

Incidentally, up to 1969, this very pleasant musical interlude after the Cathedral Service was always provided by the excellent Band of the Training Ship *MERCURY* (River Hamble), and when the latter was disestablished the Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, kindly arranged for the band of the Royal Marines to continue this much appreciated performance.

The whole of the arrangements for the Winchester Cathedral Shipping Festival Service is undertaken by the Southampton Master Mariners' Club.



*The late The Very Rev. James Atwell, the previous Dean of Winchester, from 2006 to 2016, had a close relationship with the Club. He and his wife Lorna were top table guests at the annual Sea Pie Suppers from 2013 to 2016 and he accepted Honorary Membership of the Club in 2016, the year of his retirement. Sadly, he Went Aloft in December 2020.*

# The Entertainment Officer

**Baird Maritime Ship World, 16 July 2021**

**Michael Grey reminisces**

The master's instructions were short and to the point as he briefed his new fourth mate who had just joined, the ink on his second mate's certificate scarcely dry. After a four-year apprenticeship in the company's ships, there was no need to question the officer's knowledge of the various duties and procedures. The Board of Trade had verified his competence in navigation and other statutory issues. But Captain Hawkins made it absolutely clear that my reputation on the voyage to and from New Zealand would largely depend on my efficiency and effectiveness as the ship's "entertainment officer".

This was in fact no surprise, as all fourth mates (or junior third officer to be correct) in our company were expected to take on this role, principally to maintain morale among the 70 to 80 souls and keep them happily (the happiness factor was actually immaterial) occupied in their off-duty hours. You were expected to take this quasi-voluntary job as seriously as you took your other duties.

There was a range of responsibilities. Some were routine, such as looking after the Marine Society's library, supervising its opening hours and making sure some reluctant blighter returned his books on time. There were films to be exchanged with other company ships, when we met them in port. There were also jobs that required the EO to use charm, guile, and, if necessary, his rank, to persuade crewmembers out of their deep-sea torpor and incipient idleness by organising a range of competitions involving the whole crew and the 12 passengers, who were certainly not going to be spared, just because they had paid for their trip.

Cribbage was a popular card game that could serve as a vehicle for a knock-out competition, as would dominoes, with chess as a minority sport for the more intellectual. But it was one thing to persuade crewmembers to enter, another to ensure that they actually got around to playing their game on schedule. There could be no slacking!

Once we were into good weather, activities could be organised on deck, with deck golf and deck tennis competitions. Some took these very seriously, with their own highly engineered mallets, some senior officers getting very narked if they were knocked out by juniors without their years of experience on the pitch-pine decks. Tombola and Horse Racing were popular fine-weather pursuits, with the chief steward usually muscling in to cope with the betting and financial matters. There would be prize cups and pewter tankards awarded to the winners, presented either by the master, or if he was sulking having been defeated in his final round, by a lady passenger.

Once out on the coast, the role of the EO took on a new dimension as promoter and organiser of the ship's sports club, with games of soccer or cricket to be played, usually against other ships and with the assistance of the local Mission chaplain. These could be gala occasions – in Auckland there was a club composed of people who had in years past deserted from their ships, prospered hugely in their new country, and liked to entertain visiting ships' soccer teams. On one ill-advised occasion our ship was even persuaded to get together a rugby team, to play a team of women in Wellington's Hutt Valley. We were duly slaughtered, which was predictable as most of these formidable women worked in the local meat works.

The EO was also expected to be the organiser of parties on board, hopefully involving local nurses, and was encouraged to build up a contact book of telephone numbers of the nearest nurses' home. If the fourth mate was lucky, he might find that other officers would assist in charming their way past hostile sisters who had unfortunately picked

up the telephone. Younger radio officers, who had very little else to occupy themselves in port, could be brilliant emissaries on behalf of the ship.

Some ships had well-resourced and brilliantly managed sports clubs, usually run around the officer's bar (aeons before ships went dry), which were able to organise sightseeing excursions and more cultural events. On one ship we were able to finance whole coach trips into the hinterland. And in an era when our cargo liners spent longer in port than they ever did at sea, there was time to make the most of what we found.

Our shipboard societies were large enough to develop some sort of social life during our voyages, providing the basis of a "happy ship". Today, with twenty or so souls rattling around in some gigantic ship, with a crew barely able to understand one another, it is difficult to conceive of any sort of equivalent to our lifestyles.

I can recall talking to a very bright woman who had been second mate of a VLCC and who had tried very hard to generate some sort of cheerfulness out of a grim return trip to the gulf on this huge under-populated ship. Those on board, wedded to their personal electronic "devices", would shut themselves in their cabins off-watch and only appeared at mealtimes when their conversation was limited to requests to "pass the salt".

It was not a berth for anyone who enjoyed the company of human beings. Even the very best entertainment officer, I sensed, would have retired, defeated.

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## The Cachalots Deck

The members' only section of the Club's website contains such information that is considered to be in the preserve of Cachalots and of no concern to non-members. We do not conduct any financial matters on the site so stringent security measures are not considered necessary. Access is gained by a simple log-in procedure of a user name and password. An initial registration is required and this is all explained on the 'Login', 'Register now' and 'Edit Profile' pages.

The other pages include members information such as 'New Members', 'Gone Aloft' and 'Obituaries' as well as 250 Club and coming events. All that information does come to you in the pages of this newsletter but is recorded there for reference.

As are the latest *Cachalot* and **all** of the previous editions. The website, both the public and members' only sections, should be your first port of call for any information on the Club.

So far, less than half of the members on our email distribution list have registered for access to the Cachalots' Deck. We realise that it is not something that members need to consult daily, or even weekly, but once you have jumped through the hoops of the registration process there is a wealth (!) of information available at a few clicks of a button.

## Gone Aloft

The following members have  
Gone Aloft since March 2020.

**I.E.G. Downer (Past Captain 1988), 13 April '20**

**A.J. Ireland, 23 May '20**

**A.G.W. Miller, 5 September '20**

**E.A. Hunter, 24 September '20**

**L. Street, 19 November '20**

**J. Atwell (Honorary Member), 12 December '20**

**R.D. Seago, 25 December '20**

**R.T.N. Best, 3 February '21**

**C.A. Brindle, 4 May '21**

**G.F. Cartwright (Past Captain 2010) 24 June '21**

## The CACHALOTS

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The Club room is currently open on just one day of the week, Friday, 1130 - 1500. Liz will be only too happy to serve you a drink. There is no catering on site but there are many sandwich outlets within easy walking distance.

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.



WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

## Zoom Meeting

**2.30pm, Saturday, September 11th 2021**

**~ Shout at the Devil ~ with Kevin Patience ~**

**...German cruiser Königsberg ... East Africa 1914/15...**

**...blockaded and destroyed by Royal Navy & RN Air Service ...**

A unique piece of naval history from the First World War about the German warship Königsberg blockaded and destroyed by the Royal Navy and the Royal Naval Air Service in an East African river in 1914/15. One of the lesser-known campaigns of WW1 took place in (what is now) Kenya and Tanzania. With a British presence at Zanzibar, only 20 miles off the coast, and Germany holding Dar es Salam and a coastal strip - a German surface raider had to be stopped.

Their Secretary, Steve Pink, says:

There is no need to request an invitation to our September 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](http://shipsdorset.org) and follow the links.