

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 93 Printer Friendly Digital Edition October 2021

Captain's Log

For the first time in over 18 months I have been able to discharge my duties as the Club Captain with something approaching normality. A 'dead cat bounce?'; possibly, but still a refreshing change.

The most significant event of the month has to be Merchant Navy Day, which turned into something of a Merchant Navy weekend. Firstly, at 1000 on Friday 3rd I attended the Red Ensign flag raising ceremony at Southampton Civic Centre. In normal years this would be followed an hour later by a repeat event outside the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's HQ at the bottom end of Commercial Road. However, this year the civic ceremony, which was started by Councillor Les Harris during his tenure as Mayor of Southampton and Port Admiral, was the only event. The Port Chaplain, Rev John Attenborough, led a short service which was followed by the hoisting of the flag and a few words from Councillor Alex Houghton, the current Mayor. The sun shone and the only thing missing was enough onlookers, which for a port city like Southampton was a little disappointing. Note to self to try and drum up more support next year.

Perhaps people were saving themselves for later because the Merchant Navy Day Service at St Michael's church in the evening was well attended. Avid readers of this newsletter will recall the disappointment when it became clear that the usual Shipping Festival Service at Winchester Cathedral in June would not be possible this year, and the late decision to hold a service in the city.

It was a cut-down event compared to the Winchester service, just the Red, White and Blue ensigns, paraded by Southampton Sea Cadets, but the City of Southampton (Albion) Band and the organist slugged it out in traditional style. The service was led by the Revd John, and Rt Revd David Williams, Bishop of Basingstoke, who gave us one of the best 'Shipping Festival' homilies in years. Rear Admiral Iain Henderson CB CBE DL, the Vice Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire, Phillip Sykes, the High Sheriff of Hampshire, and the Mayor and the Sheriff of Southampton all attended and were most fulsome in their praise after the service. St Michael's might be small and plain compared to Winchester Cathedral, but I think all agreed that whether or not the traditional Shipping Festival in June can be resurrected, there is a place in our calendar for a local service to mark Merchant Navy Day.

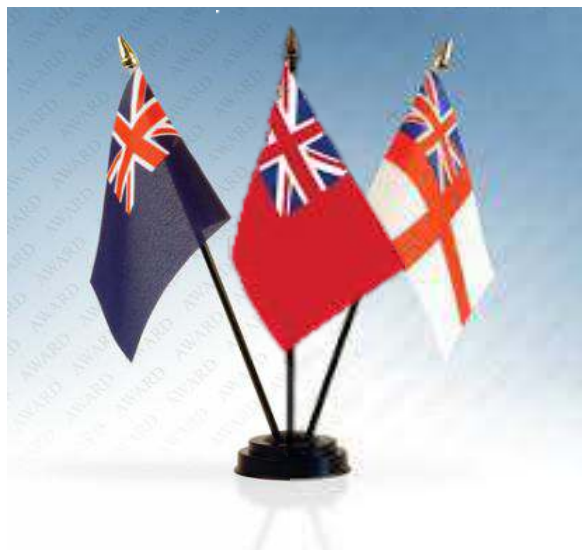
The weekend rounded off with the usual remembrance service at Holyrood Church, where I was joined by Past Captains Ian Thompson and Les Morris laying a wreath on behalf of the Cachalots. Fortunately, the sun continued to shine (for those that have not visited Holyrood, it is the bombed-out church without a roof), but again we could have done with more support. I know that Remembrance Day is not far off, but these are poignant events that focus on 'our people', and for that they are well worth attending.

Finally, and on a lighter note, in my alter ego as one of the trustees for Southampton Sea Cadets, I can report that the cadets were once again raising money at the Boat Show. My suspicion is that footfall at the show was down on pre-pandemic years, but it was nonetheless a great success, and everyone I spoke to was glad to be back.

Green shoots and, to cap it all, elsewhere in the newsletter you will find a draft social programme!

Keep safe

Andrew Moll, Club Captain



Boatsteerers' Locker

Greetings to all, unfortunately and unlike my predecessor, I have no funny tales of woe of my road or surroundings to pass on!

Meeting's at RBL – we have had meetings at RBL on a Friday since the opening of lockdown in late June. 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. Whilst the numbers are low, we will continue with a Friday only opening. At present, with low numbers attending the Club room we do not see any benefit in opening on Thursday but will keep this under review.

Zoom gatherings – I have continued where possible to maintain a Zoom gathering on a Thursday morning, opening from 1045. The maximum joiners have been three but often has been me and one other. For the most part I am free on a Thursday so not too onerous and happy to continue hosting this for members. Where I have something else on, I will set the Zoom call up for people to join at the associated time of 1100. You may find yourself on your own and looking a blank bulkhead.

250 Club – following a flurry of wins by 'famille' Plumley, a number of shares have been purchased which obviously gives other members a chance of winning. Remember, you have to be in it to win it!!!

Provisional Programme of Events for 2021-2022 - The Cachalot website now carries a provisional programme which our Function's Officer has been working on.

Merchant Navy Day Service – 1830 Friday 3rd September 2021 - This event went off well with positive feedback from civic dignitaries, VIP guests and Cachalots. A strong theme was 'Will we do it again?' and 'Will we hold the Shipping Festival Service in Southampton?' The committee agreed that we would not try and manage both a Shipping Festival Service in June and a MN Day Service in September.

Shipping Festival Service – 1900 Thursday 9th June 2022 - The committee agreed that we should approach St. Michael's with a view to going ahead with a Shipping Festival Service instead of using Winchester. I have been in contact with St. Michael's and they have agreed for us to go ahead and plan for this on **Thursday 9th June 2022** at 1900, so a date for your diaries. Further information and details will be promulgated closer to the date so please make a note in your 2022 diary or calendar.

Cachalots Golf Day – Thursday 30th September 2021 - The golf day will be played as this digital Cachalot is published. We have 36 entries for our golf day 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. A report will follow in the next edition of *The Cachalot*.

Sea Pie Supper – Friday 4th February 2022 - Terry and I met with the Event Co-ordinator recently to confirm arrangements and we feel confident about what will be in place. There was some concern as the Dear Leader and his chums debated the use of a Covid Pass for entering certain venues but that issue now seems to have been removed.

Annual General Meeting – 1830 Thursday 13th January 2022 - The committee decided that the AGM for 2022 should be held in person with an option for a link by Zoom. This arrangement has been tested on the Smart TV in the Club room and we reckon this will work provided we ensure a strict protocol for contributing to the meeting is in place and applied.

Enjoy your October

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE

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



WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

Zoom Meeting

Of the Dorset branch of the World Ship Society

2.30pm, Saturday, October 9th 2021

**~ Stockholm's amazing Vintage Steamers ~ ~ with David Trevor-Jones ~
... Still in service ... the Lake, Canal & Archipelago fleets ... a parade unparalleled in Europe ...**

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.

Cachalots Merchant Navy Day Service 2021

St. Michael's Church, Southampton

At the management committee in June this year and having lost the opportunity to hold a Shipping Festival Service at Winchester Cathedral due to Covid-19 restrictions, a suggestion was put forward to approach St. Michael's church and for the Cachalots to arrange a Merchant Navy Day service on Merchant Navy Day, 3rd September. Usually such an event will require a lead-time of about 6 months to plan, so an exciting challenge!!

With help from the Reverend John Attenborough, the services of the Bishop of Basingstoke, the Right Reverend David Williams were secured to officiate and provide the sermon. A meeting was held with the churchwarden to discuss what we could do, and not do and a plan was put together by our small team. This included developing the order of service and issuing invitations to civic VIP's as well as senior organisations associated with shipping within Southampton.

The day was warm and bright and with access to the church from soon after 1800 we commenced preparations. The band were waiting at the door in readiness! Despite some teething issues with seating, mainly due to trying to achieve some element of social distancing, the church and congregation were ready for the arrival of the flags.

This year we downsized the parade significantly with just three ensigns, Red, White and Blue being brought forward by the flag bearers. The Vice Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Rear Admiral Iain Henderson, met with the Guard of Honour provided by the Southampton Sea Cadets and the flag bearers. Alex Mackenzie, an engineering cadet from Warsash Maritime Academy / Solent University carried the Red Ensign and two Sea Cadets carried the White and Blue Ensigns respectively.



Captain Andrew Moll, Staff Captain Martin Phipps and Lt Lindsay Basset (Unit Commanding Officer SSC), together with the flag bearers and Guard of Honour, ready to welcome the Vice Lord-Lieutenant, Rear Admiral Iain Henderson CB CBE DL



With the striking of the Pilotage Bell, the three flag bearers walked forward where Bishop David received the flags and John Attenborough placed them in the flag cradle. And with that, the service was underway in a similar manner to that usually undertaken at Winchester but considerably shortened.

With the organ and band providing accompaniment, each hymn was sung with great gusto.

One of the feedback emails highlighted the opportunity to sing hymns again.

Captain Andrew Moll read the Lesson and Bishop David provided a warming and hearty Sermon which was well received and also commented upon in our feedback emails.

At the end of the service, the three flag bearers collected the flags and brought them back to the West door and waited while the congregation departed by the North door.

A large number of guests waited around to chat afterwards with plenty of positive feedback being heard,

We set a rule for not having photographs inside the church but Ian Thomson managed to take some of the group outside at the end.

Overall, a very rewarding evening. My thanks go to all the Cachalots who supported the service with special mention to Terry Clark, Martin Phipps, Noel Becket and to Andrew Moll for the suggestion in taking this forward at St. Michael's.

Our thanks, as Cachalots, go to the churchwardens, organist, Southampton Albion Band, civic dignitaries and VIP guests, other guests and the Sea Cadet guard of honour who attended. Thanks also to the flag bearers who undertook the task for the first time in a calm manner.

Robin Plumley



Curry Lunch



KUTI'S ROYAL PIER



“Officially the Best Indian Restaurant in the UK”

Following a successful and enjoyable lunch at Kuti's on 28th August (see pictures below), another lunch has been booked there on

Saturday 9th October

1230 for 1300 (Note the new time)

The price will be **£25** per person, not including a gratuity.

This time we have asked to be seated in the downstairs section

Book, and pay, through the office by 1st October please.

Last time we were caught out by preparations for the Boat Show and there was no parking at Mayflower park. Hopefully it will be open this time and the ticket machines will give you 2 hours for £1 or 4 hours for £2.



Club Buffet Supper

A Buffet Supper is arranged for the evening of

Thursday October 21st

in the downstairs room at the Royal British Legion Club, 1900 for 1930.

An informal event as we will be testing the post-lockdown response and also the services of a new caterer.

In acknowledgement of the date it is hoped to have a Trafalgar Night theme.

The price is yet to be confirmed and you will be advised by *Cachalite* when it has been settled.

What the....? Who the....?

Here's another teaser for you, brought to you by Cachalot Peter Sarah who writes: Having recently assisted in identifying the cap badge for Thompson, Anderson & Co., that traded as Sierra Line, I have another conundrum.

When I was assisting in the emptying of the Seafarers Centre with John Attenborough, Port Chaplain, we came across a dark blue tie with the above “sown-in” badge or logo. I have looked everywhere that I know and also with my good friend and maritime author Alistair Arnott, and we have both drawn a complete blank.

The anchor seems to guide us to the sea-going world, but the wings with a green pineapple and red plumes doesn't seem to align with any company that we know of. Again, it would seem to relate to the maritime world as it was obviously left at the “old” Southampton Seafarers Centre prior to its closure. I wonder if any Cachalot member can help solve this one.



While we are in the quizzical mood, can you identify this thigh flashing Past Captain? The picture turned up on Facebook so is in the public domain and fair game to any copy hungry editor.

On the right is another Past Captain, wistfully contemplating the responsibilities of his first command, Mudeford c ~1959.
Identities revealed on the last page.



PROGRAMME OF EVENTS - 2021 -2022

**This is a provisional list and all dates are subject to change
– see latest edition of *The Cachalot* or Club Website**

2021

SAT	OCT	09	CURRY LUNCH - KUTI's	1230
THU	OCT	21	CLUB BUFFET SUPPER - RBL - Trafalgar Theme	1900
THU	NOV	04	SALE OF SEA PIE SUPPER TICKETS	
THU	NOV	11	HARPOONERS' DINNER - STAR HOTEL -Black Tie & Miniatures	1900
SAT	DEC	11	CHRISTMAS GATHERING - KUTI's	1230
FRI	DEC	17	Last day Club Room open before Christmas	

2022

	JAN	??	DOCKLANDS NEW YEAR SERVICE TBC	
THU	JAN	06	Club Room re-opens	1130
SAT	JAN	08	MEETING OF PAST CAPTAINS - CLUB ROOM	1200
THU	JAN	13	ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING -CLUB ROOM with ZOOM OPTION	1830
THU	JAN	20	BURNS NIGHT DINNER - RBL - Black Tie & Miniatures	1900
FRI	FEB	04	SEA PIE SUPPER - ST. MARY'S STADIUM - Black Tie & Miniatures	1815
SAT	FEB	19	CURRY LUNCH - KUTI's	1230
FRI	MAR	22	SKITTLES EVENING - SOUTHAMPTON (OLD) BOWLING CLUB TBC	
SAT	APR	30	CURRY LUNCH - KUTI's	1230
THU	MAY	19	SUMMER CLUB SUPPER TBC	
THU	JUNE	09	SHIPPING FESTIVAL SERVICE - ST.MICHAEL'S CHURCH	1830
SAT	JUNE	11	CURRY LUNCH - KUTI's	1230
SAT	AUG	13	CURRY LUNCH - KUTI's	1230

UNLESS OTHERWISE SPECIFIED, DRESS CODE IS SMART CASUAL

Age before beauty

Ship & Offshore Repair Journal Aug-Sept 2021 Dockgate Column by Michael Grey

Who can remember the bleak days of the 1980s, when the bulk trades were mostly unprofitable, and abandoned to those who could operate ships most cheaply. And the consequences were not difficult to predict, with maintenance cut to the bone, repairs avoided where it was possible and bulker casualties assuming epidemic proportions.

Ships, particularly those carrying heavy ore, were falling to bits, not that they were built brilliantly in the first place, with a premium on the lightest possible steel weight and adventurous experiments with new compositions of steel. This period also coincided with some notably rough treatment in both loading and discharging ports, with exciting new loading equipment that could hurl 16,000 tonnes per hour into a ship and at the other end of the voyage, clever machines that would pummel a hold bulkhead to bring down hanging cargo and 50 tonne grabs swinging about with drivers that didn't mind what they clouted.

But when rewards were so poor, charterers looking only at the bottom line and condition of a ship apparently immaterial, one could not be surprised at the short lives and sometimes violent ends for many of these ships. I remember attending a conference on ship quality and safety in Amsterdam, when a representative of a major charterer said, without the slightest sense of shame, that he would not pay a cent extra for a well-maintained and structurally sound ship. I also recall another meeting when a former Capesize bulker master told the assembly that the only painting was done freshening up orange lines on the weather deck where he said it was safe to walk.

So it was quite a surprise when the venerable Norwegian company Bergesen ordered the biggest heavy ore carrier the world had even seen. Delivered in 1986, *Berge Stahl* took everyone by surprise when she emerged from Hyundai's yard to fulfil a long term contract of affreightment. She was a ship that took everyone's breath away at nearly 375,000dwt and a laden 75foot draught.

There were at that time only two ports in the world able to handle this monster – a new deep-water terminal in Brazil and one in Rotterdam, both of which would require judicious use of the tides. A description of the ship at the time suggested that she would produce “entirely new standards of scale economics”, as indeed she did, as this huge ship was simply twice the size of the vessels in the Capesize fleet at the time. This single huge hull, it was calculated, plodding along at 13 knots, could carry some 4 million tonnes of Brazilian ore every year.



And so it transpired, with the *Berge Stahl* churning up the Dover Strait deep water lane every six weeks or so to meet the helicopters of the Rotterdam pilot service with the latest intelligence about the depth of water in the port approaches. There were some wonderful photographs taken by the Skyfotos aircraft on these inward voyages, which managed to capture the sheer weight of water displaced by the huge hull, creaming along with a “bone in her teeth”.

Year succeeded year and this huge ship went on and on, her record as the world's biggest bulk carrier standing until 2011, when she was overtaken by the first of the Vale ultra large bulk carriers.

The world was, however changing, in ship safety terms for the best, as the scandal of ill-maintained bulk carrier sinkings ebbed away, with fewer bulk carrier seafarers meeting a sudden and violent end as their laden hulls filled. The ship, which had been owned by the standalone bulk carrier operator Berge Bulk since 2007 also found a select few ports available for her huge size, with the explosion in Chinese deep water terminal construction. The Omani port of Sohar was under construction at that time and would have the necessary depth. Her final trip to Rotterdam took place in 2016, when it was rather assumed that this would be the end of her, but she managed a useful final period of trading to the Omani port. Only in 2021, with this ship 35 years old, did her owners withdraw her from service and consign her to the recyclers' shears.

It is worth considering the exceptionally long life of this ship and ask why, if there were big ore carriers being scrapped before the fourth Special Survey (and quite often the Third), why this huge and hard-worked ship lasted so long. Not irrelevant to this is the philosophy of the owners and operators, which at the time of the *Berge Stahl's* construction, often saw a new ship kept, with a modest amount of maintenance until the Second Special survey by her initial owner and then sold, to somebody else who would pick up the pieces, maintenance wise. The combination of a less than robust initial construction, money-saving specification and skimping on the maintenance needed by a ship getting an ore-carrier's treatment in port, was not something that promoted longevity.

The sheer size of *Berge Stahl*, and the fact that nothing like her had ever been attempted by her South Korean builders would mean that she was rather special from her conception in the design department. She was a “robust” ship, in every sense of the word, but her subsequent owners were clearly determined that her standard of maintenance would not, as with so many other ships, be dependent on the vagaries of the freight market. Her owners were not people who could be persuaded by charterers to cut corners, and those responsible for loading the ship knew that there would never be any nonsense about adventurous variations from the specified cargo plan and loading sequence being tolerated.

The ship always looked good. I saw her coming past the Hook of Holland in the early part of this century, with a fleet of tugs fussing around her and you would never have known she was twenty years old. She is gone now, but this 35 year old giant ought to be remembered, not least for what a ship can deliver, if she is built well and maintained assiduously throughout her life, by owners who care.

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and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey greyrjm@gmail.com

Peter Marriot Bursary 2021

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the various lockdowns and whether the offshore vessels would operate this year the committee agreed to modify the bursary for 2021. The pandemic has had a serious impact on the normal fundraising activities of both Southampton and Winchester Sea Cadet Units. Therefore, the Cachalots offered the normal £500 to each unit as either the full bursary, bursary/donation or donation. While the units did hold back to assess the situation with the offshore vessels in the end both chose the £500 donation towards training facilities.

The Southampton unit premises has recently undergone an extensive expansion programme enabling the unit to double the number of cadets it can train, making it one of the largest in the UK. Our contribution will be used towards the cost of upgrading the pontoon arrangements vital for their waterborne activities.

Our contribution to the Winchester unit has been put towards their planned purchase of a 'Cadet Field Gun'. These are smaller replicas of the real ones but still come in at 567 Kg with no firing mechanism. The aim is to give added structure to the ceremonial aspect of the curriculum through the required discipline, teamwork and leadership needed to handle the field gun safely. There are National 'Cadet Field Gun' competitions held between military units, further education colleges and some school combined cadet forces, one of which is close to the Winchester unit.

One of the Winchester cadets, a previous recipient of the bursary, has been accepted but deferred until next year (due to Covid) into the South Shields Marine School. When we have full details of the course and start date I will report back to the Cachalots. Meanwhile another of the cadets is well on her way at South Shields studying for the Advanced Diploma in Nautical Science under the Merchant Navy Deck Officer Trainee Scheme. I know that the membership will wish them both well in their chosen careers.

John Mileusnic Bursary Officer



You can't abolish markets

Seatrade Maritime Opinion and Analysis August 2021

It was a dinner that became distinctly chocolate-flavoured as I was seated alongside the UK's then biggest chocolate exporter, who spent about two hours (it felt longer) whining about the cost of shipping his product around the world. This was itself curious, because at that time the container lines were suffering one of their most prolonged periods of appalling results, with quite ridiculous rates and boxes being filled with improbable cargoes, just to get a tiny return on their eastbound leg.

But just as farmers persistently complain about the weather, shippers are never satisfied and this chap finally admitted that it was only the rock-bottom rates that enabled his chocs to be shipped to the other side of the world and sold at a profit. Shipping, famously said Dr Martin Stopford during one of these endless lean years, was becoming regarded as a branch of the social services, free at the point of use.

Now, of course, the boot is on the other foot and the customers are getting stupendously angry about their shipping costs, demanding everything from government interventions to the unleashing of the competition authorities to control the "price gouging" they allege is taking place at their expense.

If you look at these things from a historical point of view, there is a sort of circle of self-harm about these peaks and troughs, admittedly skewed out of alignment by the pandemic. You might suggest that if the lines had not found it almost impossible to make a reasonable return, they would not have been forced to construct larger and larger ships, chasing the moving target of lower unit costs.

They have built these monsters, faster than the ports can easily handle them, dumping their vast loads onto crowded terminals that have struggled to cope, no matter how many monstrous shiploader cranes and ground handling machines they have provided. It was calculated, when the first 20,000teu vessels appeared, that to accommodate the moves associated with just one of these ships in a major European port, something in the region of eight feeder ships, 60 trains, half a dozen barges and nearly 2800 trucks would be required to facilitate the exchange.

Other pre-pandemic problems were already being caused by the slowdown in ship speeds to save the planet and the everyday difficulties caused by empties and the endemic imbalances on all the mainline routes. It was said, probably with some hyperbole, that the stack of empty containers at one north European port could, like the Great Wall of China, could be seen from space.

All ports were just beginning to come to terms with the advent of the giant ships or the resultant "cascading" of the smaller ships they had displaced, when the pandemic – the ultimate "Black Swan" event – cast its malign shadow over the world. The fact that the global logistics chain kept on running despite everything has been something of a major miracle, and those aboard ship and those ashore deserve far more credit than they have been given. Let us not even think of the consequences, had the ships stopped.

To listen to the furious denunciations of shippers' organisations one might think that getting international transport back to some semblance of normality, and freight rates they might find acceptable, was just a matter of will for the lines and a bit of administration. But it is a long haul back from a situation where ports are still struggling with local lockdowns, labour shortages caused by sickness and quarantine. The imbalances are still monstrous, exacerbated by the haulier shortages and boxes being in the wrong place. Local events, such as the notorious blockage in the Suez Canal and giant ports in China suddenly being closed

for quarantine reasons will clearly prolong the agony, but like the pandemic itself, the agonies of the shippers will be replaced by something more benign. Some 350 big container ships, anchored off and waiting for a berth is itself a notable brake on the supply chain.

Some might suggest that the shipping industry has finally discovered some financial discipline and has permitted the markets to give them some long-required advantage. It is perhaps more realistic to look at the newbuilding situation, with owners taking full advantage of the shipbuilders' keen prices. The slide into normality and more balance won't happen this year, but eventually it surely will. That's the power of markets.

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Training – someone else's problem

Seatrade Maritime Opinion & Analysis September 2021

It shouldn't be terribly surprising that the poor treatment of seafarers by too many governments and their agencies during the pandemic has made their career markedly less attractive. We might also deduce that this behaviour will not have encouraged seafarers to prolong these experiences and many will decide that enough is enough and the shore side beckons – permanently. We might also factor in the findings of the ICS-BIMCO regular review of the workforce which, without these pandemic-related problems has pointed to shortages of ships' officers ahead. Thus are the seeds of another manpower crisis sown.

Curiously, as the industry focuses on the more fashionable problems of decarbonisation and the lack of diversity in the maritime sector, the issue of actually replenishing the seafaring workforce has been put on the back burner. Despite well-meaning campaigns to enthuse the public about maritime industry opportunities, there is still a marked reluctance in the shipping industry to “grow its own” and invest in training. And nowhere is this more critical in the provision of berths aboard ships for cadets and trainees where they can obtain their necessary sea time qualifications.

For too many shipping companies, on-board trainees are seen to be an unaffordable burden. And why bother, when it is far easier and infinitely cheaper to merely poach ships' officers who have been trained at somebody else's expense. The excuses are many. There is no suitable accommodation for a couple of cadets, or the working pattern of the hard-pressed officers would not allow them time to properly mentor the trainees. Training, with all its college time and insistence on degrees, is just too expensive for a sector struggling to earn a reasonable reward.

This lack of on-board training opportunities for sea time has become an almost universal complaint among those charged with educating sea staff. Even the big third party ship managers, who run their own educational facilities, find reluctance among their clients to step up to the training plate. It was not too many years ago that one of the world's largest said that such was the sea time problem that if one of their clients would partner with them to supply a ship that could carry a reasonable number of cadets, they would run it at no cost to the client. There were no takers.

Years later and something of a council of despair seems to have taken over, with suggestions that actual sea time requirements could be considerably shortened and even increasingly replaced by simulation and even more remorselessly shore-based than it is already. And on the face of it, this would be much easier than trying to persuade ship operators to take some trainees off to sea on their ships. And if modern air forces can train their fast jet pilots without having them get into a real cockpit and burn a lot of fuel, surely there is a case for more maritime simulator training? Senior ships' officers, who are already nervous about their junior watchkeepers who have barely kept a watch at sea, are understandably worried about the further diminution of their on-board experience.

It was some time ago that the Indian government, in a submission to the International Maritime Organisation, suggested that it should be made mandatory for ships over a certain size to carry trainees. Sadly, this failed to solicit any support and never resurfaced, although it surely had much merit. It was also something that would be impossible to justify in unilateral terms, as any national flag, bold enough to embark on such a policy would inevitably find its fleet shrinking with owners fleeing to more accommodating registers without such requirements.

Should we have to “bribe” owners to train the people who they need to make money for them, through helpful Tonnage Tax regimes? It is a way of getting some berths for trainees, although if the owners have no intention of ever employing these young people once they have qualified, what's the point?

So the industry will blunder on as usual, with no long term strategy, the poachers beaver away at the expense of others, with the crisis bound to get worse and those willing to grow their own remaining in the minority. Training remains in the sights of the bean counters as a cost rather than an investment and young people, lured to a sea career - or persuaded by a lack of alternative employment - will find it ever harder to get that sea experience they really need for their qualifications. It shouldn't be like this.

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I may well be accused of bringing you a surfeit of comment from Michael Grey, with no less than six of his articles in this edition, but there are few that could match the pertinence and astuteness of his observations of our maritime world. So, in the absence of any alternative contributions, I will make no apology but enjoy the privilege of being able to reproduce them here. His latest, and the most topical, can be found on [Page 26](#) Ed.

Keeping the human at the centre

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 786 Sept. 10th 2021

By Michael Grey



Whether we are talking about the bewildering screen-based alerts and controls on the average modern car, or a cooker that needs a degree in IT to work it, how often do we hear of the need for “human centred design”? It is not very different at sea these days, as the Nautical Institute’s Seaways journal pointed out in its current issue, noting that even something as simple as helm controls, which you fall back on in an emergency, can be anything but intuitive and instinctive.

We have had the Electronic Chart Display and Information System (ECDIS), which was supposed to bring about a revolution in navigational safety and convenience, for more than twenty years. But people still misuse or misinterpret it and ships still run aground with monotonous regularity, despite the availability of this clever equipment. Navigators plan the course over dangers, users disable alarms which might have warned them of hazards and eliminate important bathymetric data, because it is cluttering up the screen. But its adoption as the primary method of navigation has been a huge change, and perhaps it deserved a rather more considered approach as it was introduced to a workforce trained on paper charts and a very different way of working.

We should hugely welcome a very important piece of research from the combined resources of the UK Marine Accident Investigation Bureau and its Danish equivalent DMAIB into ECDIS, from the perspective of practitioners. In the compilation of this report, which deserves the widest circulation, the researchers undertook some 155 interviews with users and others and embarked on voyages aboard 31 ships in European waters, to find out exactly how the system was being used.

What did they find, as they confronted the whole spectrum of usage, from highly trained specialist navigation teams on cruise ships, to those operating far less sophisticated ships, some still duplicating the ECDIS with paper charts, or operating with a stand-alone ECDIS system? They found that often, whatever system was employed, it was not being used to its full potential

and that there was sometimes a worrying mismatch between the performance standards provided by the system designers and the way that watchkeepers were using their system. Indeed, it was perhaps a bit disturbing to read that, two decades in, ECDIS was still in its “implementation phase”.


On some ships they found that there was a limited understanding of the systems the officers were using and they only used them “to the degree they felt necessary”. And while the attitude of interviewees seemed to be positive, with ECDIS regarded as a good thing, reducing workload and giving the OOW more time, the industry as a whole perhaps ought to be concerned at the large variation of knowledge which they revealed.

The report highlights a fair number of residual problems, which seem to have come down through the years without any real resolution as the equipment has evolved. Like so much of the digital equipment that is part of modern life, it seems to many users to be too clever by half. The automated functions and safety alerts and alarms are not easy to use, drive people crazy in pilotage waters, where there is a lot happening on the screens and which leads to many users just disabling the alarms. There were concerns about the menu complexity, safety contour problems and worries about the quality of hydrographic information. It was cumbersome for the operator to input information on a screen, and there was dissatisfaction that the screens were so much smaller than the paper chart. And while there was reasonable confidence among users about basic functions, their ability to handle anything more complicated depended very much on their level of system knowledge. This, of course, was a function of the training the users had received.

It was suggested that courses were too short and mostly generic, with very big differences in the sort of type-specific training people received. There seemed to be great contrasts between the sort of training provided by the best – with heavy use of appropriate simulators, before people are let loose on the system, and those forced to make do with “e-learning”. What people really need, it seems to be suggested, is proper on-board instruction, with an instructor, but in a world where operators (or their bean-counters) grudge training time, this will probably be a luxury for the minority.

While systems seem to be reasonably reliable, the variation in core skills seems to be a recurring observation throughout this report. It is pointed out that too much of the auditing that people have to endure is from the standpoint of paper chart usage, and that colleges seem to train users to distrust ECDIS. The reader of this valuable report can detect, in the various attitudes, something of a generational gap, and that should surprise nobody, as the same can be observed in every facet of life ashore, where the younger generation are instinctive users of sophisticated equipment, while their seniors struggle.

But this is a very important report, which, one hopes might register with those designing all marine equipment, emphasising, once again, that they should be designing for the users, and not expect the wretched humans to adapt.

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Fantasy Island

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 787 Sept. 24th 2021 By Michael Grey

One of my happiest assignments was during the 1970s when I found myself the part-time “Maritime Editor” of the new children’s weekly “Speed and Power”. It was a wonderful role, with a readership that could be relied on to respond vigorously to just about everything the journalists said in their pages. And one of the very best treats was serving as a judge in the annual competition in which our readers were asked to imagine what transport would be like in the 21st Century. There were prizes, and the brilliant team of Speed & Power artists would work the finalists’ entries into illustrations which showed off their designs to their best advantage.

I can recall that in the imagination of our readers, there would be nuclear-powered 20,000 tonne hovercraft roaring across the Atlantic at sixty knots or more, ships built of segments that could swiftly detach themselves when they arrived off a port, leaving the rest of the ship to proceed. With a nod to the environment, (although the religion of environmentalism had yet to be invented) one entry saw a ship dragged along by a series of enormous kites flying in the Jetstream. There was at least one proposed submarine freight carrier – nuclear powered, of course.

I thought back to these innocent times the other day and wondered whether the UK Transport Secretary Grant Shapps might have been one of our readers, all those years ago, after reading his confident predictions of autonomous hydrogen-powered freight carrying submarines soon to be available around these shores. It really should have been the Prime Minister, author of extravagant capital schemes like the Irish Sea Bridge, who would have achieved the maximum attention for this spectacular proposal, but maybe he was busy.

There were few politically astute buttons that the freight-carrying submarines did not push. They were to be “powered” – perhaps he really meant fuelled - by “green” hydrogen, there would be no drivers aboard – neatly addressing the HGV driver shortage – while their environmental credentials would be further burnished, as they would collect microplastics as they patrolled our seas. All that was really missing was a pledge that they would be constructed with foreparts of soft rubber, in case of collisions with whales and dolphins. Maybe that will be in the final specification.


We are living in some very strange times and as we gird up our loins for the Great Green Glaswegian Enviro-spectacular in a couple of months’ time, there will be plenty more of this stuff. One must hope that the lights all don’t go out during the

proceedings, should the wind fail as it did the other day and they have to flash up the poor old coal-fired power stations. If you think about it, it was why the first long range steamships were all fitted with a full set of sails. The Victorians, unlike their 21st century successors, who prefer to listen to activists rather than engineers, weren't stupid.

You probably don't look to Transport Secretaries for sensible words on shipping as they are always far more comfortable talking about trains, buses and aeroplanes than anything that floats on water. But you have to hope that people who are making serious efforts to address the realities of decarbonisation are not put off by this sort of nonsense. Before anything is spent on autonomous submarines it might be worth looking at what the people who do carry freight around these shores are doing to make their ships more sustainable.

Maybe Shapps ought to take a trip on one of the new "E-Flexer" ferries that Stena is putting on the Irish Sea, or examine the actual environmental performance of Cobelfret's latest big ships. He also ought to see what the industry is actually doing in assessing new green fuels such as bio-methanol or green ammonia. But reality sadly doesn't resonate with the activists among us like something really spectacular, as the pre-Glasgow hype is ramped up and small children tell their teachers they are really frightened of "climate change". Somebody might tell this politician that there is a bit of a difference between a ship that can carry about seven miles of freight on its decks and some proposal straight out of the Speed & Power playbook.

It was a great magazine, while it lasted. Fuel was still cheap, emissions thought to be harmless and the accent was on speed, in an era of 33 knot Sea-Land SL7s and containerhips with multiple engines and a colossal thirst. Happy days.

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Gone Aloft

Captain Richard Olden 1928-2021

Richard received his pre-sea training at The Nautical College, Pangbourne prior to joining the Clan Line in 1946. He obtained his Second Mates in 1949 and in 1950, tired of long voyages, he joined Union-Castle. In 1955, after studying at Warsash, Richard became a Master Mariner and was appointed Second Officer of "Capetown Castle". A year later Union-Castle and Clan Line amalgamated and became British & Commonwealth Shipping Company ("B&C"). His first Union-Castle mailship appointment was "Capetown Castle" and it was there that he met, and subsequently married, Jane Woolley who was the Children's Hostess. Jane bore him four lovely daughters but, sadly two pre-deceased him. Richard moved quickly through the Watchkeeping ranks from cargo vessel to passenger mailship but in mid 1965 he was appointed Chief Officer of the cargo mailship "Good Hope Castle" under construction at Swan Hunter's yard on Wallsend. He sailed out as Chief Officer and a year later returned to the Passenger mailship as Staff Commander "Windsor Castle" where he served for some two years before being promoted to Master in December 1969. He served in "Rustenburg Castle" and "Elizabeth Bowater" before returning to a series of Clan line vessels. Early 1975 saw an appointment as Assistant Marine Superintendent in Southampton but in November 1977 he returned to seafaring commands in Clan vessels.



Richard's next B&C appointment was in Tanzania to investigate (on behalf of five UK based companies) why ships were delayed for so long in Dar-Es-Salaam. The job was expected to last some four months but actually ran for some four and a half YEARS ! Now, B&C was diminishing by the month, ships were being sold and redundancies commonplace so it came as little surprise to Richard to be "offered" redundancy. It was then that he applied to be a "Name" at Lloyd's and after two interviews he was accepted. In 1983 he agreed to relieve a friend as Master of a small cattle-carrying vessel on the East Coast of Africa. Later that year he joined Murray Fenton and Associates as a Surveyor

Richard was, inter alia, a Younger Brother of Trinity House, a member of the Honourable Company of Master Mariners and a Nautical Assessor in the Admiralty High Court.

Jane pre-deceased Richard - to the day - by three years. Earlier this year he was diagnosed with dementia and despite loving and extremely professional care in a Care Home he died on 23.9.21.....three days short of his 93rd Birthday. To Sara, Nicola and their family members we send our love and deepest sympathy.

An Officer and a Gentleman - he will be missed by very many.

CRK 25.9.21

Richard wrote several articles for The Cachalot, including: Shark-fishing in East Africa, MV Bonsella & My First Ship

He also wrote his own memoirs "From Cadet to Marine Consultant - A Past Era in Shipping" some copies of which may become available in the Club.

Difficult career choices

Baird Maritime Workboat World September 26th 2021, Grey Power

It is strange how crises creep up on one, moving surreptitiously between a cloud on a far horizon to a full-blown storm, without very much warning. We have a logistics hurricane blowing in much of Europe and indeed the US at present, manifesting itself in a desperate shortage of heavy goods vehicle drivers, with hundreds of thousands of vacancies and a major crisis facing the distribution of everything from fuel to groceries.

It is a reminder of our vulnerabilities in a modern, “just in time” world, where the bean counters have told us that carrying stocks of anything is a waste of money, and people who might have previously enjoyed the freedoms of the open road have decided that driving a truck is a mug’s game. And who can blame them, when they have to face greater regulation, heavy pressure to deliver on time and a seriously antisocial lifestyle, forced to sleep in their cabs alongside main roads, with little in the way of home comforts and rudimentary facilities in their “truck stops”? It is not as if the money, in most cases, really compensates them for their discomforts, while they have little in the way of status in the eyes of the general public.

But we rely on these essential workers more than ever, whether we are looking to them to move our fuel from refineries to the forecourt, or containers to and from the ports. It is worth considering that the container exchange on a single 20,000 teu ship in a major port would require some 3000 trucks alone, even with the assistance of feeder ships, barges and liner trains.

So the panic is on, with emergency powers being sought to draft in foreign drivers (from where it is unclear) and even the army, and in some countries, all sort of wage increases being hurled at HGV license holders in an attempt to poach them from others. Meanwhile the gaps are getting bigger on the supermarket shelves, questions are being asked about shortages at Christmas and politicians (who have been warned about this coming crisis for years) are now attempting to deflect blame onto the pandemic, or Brexit, or people using their containers as storage and not returning them. The drivers who have left their role, alas, don’t seem to be keen to return.

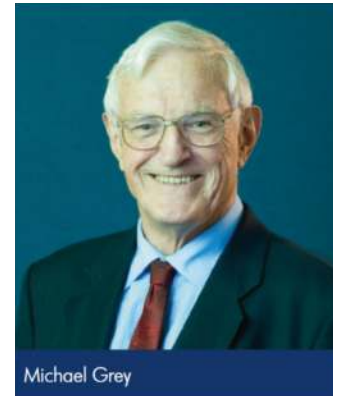
There is an interesting parallel with the maritime world and the warnings about the effect that the misery of the pandemic has had upon the seafaring workforce. Why would any self-respecting professional seafarer willingly put up with the life he or she has been forced to live during the past eighteen months? Seafaring has always been a singular job, with a lot of its attractions leached out of it well before Covid 19 heaved itself over the horizon. It has never been rich in status, despite its absolutely essential nature, you don’t go to sea to become wealthy, and the treatment of seafarers by the officials they meet in port has often left much to be desired. But since the onset of the pandemic, the treatment of this important workforce has been (and still remains in many places) utterly disgraceful. They have been treated like lepers, banned from any sorts of shore leave, forced to undergo ridiculous quarantine regulations while crew reliefs have been next to nigh impossible by unreasonable bureaucracy. Half the workforce has found it impossible to get off their ships at the end of their contracts and the other half who would relieve them has been stuck at home, unable to earn. With the exception of the welfare agencies which, as always, have tried their level best to assist with great humanity and persistence, the world in general has taken the seafaring workforce for granted. They have expected that the ships that bring their goods and take them away will arrive as usual, but have failed lamentably to think about the pressures facing those aboard them.

There is something of a vaccination programme for seafarers being operated in a minority of places, but it is estimated that only one quarter of their number has managed to get vaccinated to date. Lucky ones have found themselves in countries like Denmark, Belgium, the US or UK, where they have been able to find protection, regardless of their nationality, but most still struggle, as they will compete for scarce vaccine resources in the developing nations where they reside. It is a perfect illustration of the invisible workforce, that nobody ever thinks about, until they wreck a ship, or pollute the coast.

But one thing is certain and that is a large number of the people who have kept the ships running during the pandemic and endured this misery will be calling it a day, and will be leaving the workforce and not coming back. And none of them will be suggesting to their friends, neighbours or young people that the sea career is one they would recommend. And with the International Chamber of Shipping and BIMCO, in their regular manpower survey, already forecasting officer shortages, there is a perfect storm brewing. And if the ships can’t sail for the lack of sailors, we really have to urgently look at how the sea life can be drastically changed for the better.

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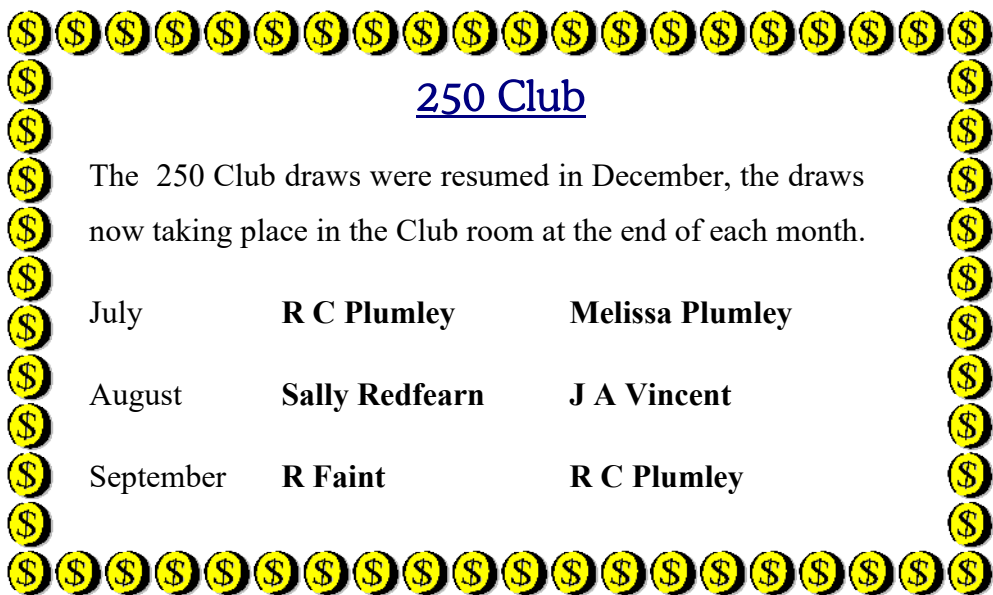
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Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure.

We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.

The cut-off date for the next edition will be
22nd October 2021

 **250 Club**

The 250 Club draws were resumed in December, the draws now taking place in the Club room at the end of each month.

July	R C Plumley	Melissa Plumley
August	Sally Redfearn	J A Vincent
September	R Faint	R C Plumley

Past Captains in the past

Pictured on page 5 were Jeremy Smart (Captain in 1998 and 2015)
and a fledgling Boatsteerer, Robin Plumley (2017)