

# ***The CACHALOT***

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

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**No 95**

**December 2021**

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## Captain's Log

Club business continues to pick up slowly, and November had two events for me to attend as Club Captain. The first, on 11 November (Armistice Day) saw me sitting on the top table for the annual Harpooners' Dinner, which this year was held in the Star Hotel. Twenty-four Harpooners attended, dressed variously in black-tie or posh frocks. After the Loyal Toast and a toast to absent Harpooners there was an opportunity for a comfort break – an important interlude given our advancing years – after which attendees were invited to entertain the assembly with a ditty, poem or anecdote, should they feel the urge. While it was an excellent evening, it is a good job this was an 'invitation only' event with no press or recording devices present. Some of the ditties would not have passed the 'political-correctness' test and might have won their narrators a spot of 'Jankers' in this modern age.

The second event was being invited to lay a wreath at the Cenotaph in Watts Park on Remembrance Sunday. I had to decline, as I was already due to lay wreath on behalf of Southampton Sea Cadets, so the Cachalots wreath was laid on our behalf by past-Captain Robin Plumley. I find it slightly ironic that 2-minutes silence of Armistice Day, the eleventh hour of the eleventh day when the guns fell silent and the killing stopped (though some historians dispute this), was replicated on the nearest Sunday – Remembrance Sunday – in 1939 so the 2-minutes silence did not interfere with wartime production! If you have not attended a Remembrance Day service at the Southampton Cenotaph, I can strongly recommend it. Designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens, the designer of the Cenotaph in Whitehall, the Cenotaph itself is an impressive centrepiece, but it the attendees themselves that make the ceremony. They span all ages, from young children to aged veterans. Some wear medals, all wear poppies, and they attend, simply, to commemorate those who gave their lives so we could live ours.

On a lighter note, in my alter-ego as Chairman of Trustees for the Southampton Sea Cadet unit, I can report that our plans to increase our pontoon-age so we can accommodate more boats (to cater for the increased number of cadets) has had a welcome boost from the Connaught Trust to the tune of £15k. This extremely generous gesture has the project off to an excellent start. If anyone you know has any good quality second-hand piles on pontoons they want to unload, please ask them to get in touch.

Christmas greetings to you all,

Keep safe

Andrew Moll

Club Captain



## Boatsteerer's Locker

**G**reetings to all, so far so good in our slow return to 'normal'. We have enjoyed a couple of Curry lunches, a Supper at the RBL and a Trafalgar themed dinner at the RBL too. All events have been well attended. Our Christmas lunch has already been subscribed to the maximum numbers we can fit and we have a reserve list. Twenty-three Harpooners also had a dinner at The Star Hotel which was very enjoyable. See article included.

**Meeting's at RBL** – our meetings at the RBL Club room have generally been busy and at our next meeting of the management committee we will discuss options about opening up on a Thursday as well. This does of course incur additional costs to the club, and we would take account of any possible interest by members in opening on a Thursday in making our decision. Please let me know if you have a viewpoint on this.

**Zoom gatherings** – I am continuing where possible to maintain a Zoom gathering on a Thursday morning, opening from 1045. It has been good to see some new faces, and regular ones. 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, usually golf, I will set the Zoom call up for people to join any time after 1045. You may find yourself on your own and looking at a blank bulkhead!

**250 Club** – Remember, you have to be in it to win it!!!

### **Sea Pie Supper – Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

With a contract signed and planning moving forward, we keep our fingers crossed that our Dear Leader will not invoke any controls through the winter months and spoil our evening. Tickets went on sale on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> November and we are already approaching 350 reservations which hopefully will become paid for reservations soon. Please remember to contact Richard James if you wish to reserve a place and purchase a ticket(s) for the Sea Pie Supper. Members £53 and guests £65.

### **Meeting of Past Captains**

This meeting will be held on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2022 at the RBL at 1200.

### **Annual General Meeting – 1830 Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022**

*See the notice board in the centre pages.*

### **Functions**

After two successful evenings at the RBL with Sam@chef, John Noble, our Functions Officer has continued to link up with Sam looking at future meal events.

The Christmas Lunch on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> December at RBL is fully subscribed but we do have a reserve list. Unfortunately, we have a limitation of forty-four places, hence the first come, first served principle being applied. I understand there maybe some members who are on the list but have not paid. Can you please make your payment of £30 at the soonest opportunity, preferably using the BACS arrangement to the Club account. Please ask me if you require the details.

A Burn's Night Supper is being planned for Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2022, to be held in the lower room at the RBL. Costing is still be determined and a call for attendees and the cost will be issued soon.

Please note the following changes to the programme of events:

Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> December – Christmas Gathering at Kuti's – **CANCELLED**

The Club room will be open for the last time in 2021 on Friday 17<sup>th</sup> December and service will resume again on Friday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2022 unless we have decided to open on Thursday too. You will be notified.

It seems awfully early to be saying this but, I wish you all an enjoyable Christmas and New Year. Enjoy your December

Robin

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



## Social Events at Last!!

### Harpooners Dinner – Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2021



#### Captains all

Top table, from the left:

Captain Reg Kelso, MBE, MNM, FNI, President of the Club  
Captain Martin Phipps, MBE, Staff-Captain  
Captain Andrew Moll, Captain of the Club  
Captain Rachel Dunn, MNM, Post-Captain  
Captain Robin Plumley, MBE, Boatsteerer

**T**wenty-four Harpooners, past and present, gathered at The Star Hotel for an annual dinner, postponed for the past two years due to ‘you know what’!!

A simple meal with Smoked Salmon Pate followed by Chicken Supreme and finished off by a cheeseboard with port, coffee and after dinner mints.

The Grace was read by our Honorary President, Captain Reg Kelso.

Captain Andrew Moll provided the Loyal Toast and the toast to Absent Harpooners.

The lamp, full of whale oil of course, was swung afterwards with tales, jokes and reminiscing of sea days gone by.

A super evening in great company.

Many thanks to Gaie Sully and the staff at the hotel for hosting us and providing us with an enjoyable evening.



The upstairs room, at the front of the Star Hotel, was an ideal setting for the event.



Captain Lionel Hall, (Past Boatsteerer), Julia Whorwood, Ken Dagnall MBE (Post Boatsteerer) and Harpooner Noel Becket are overseen by President Reg Kelso.

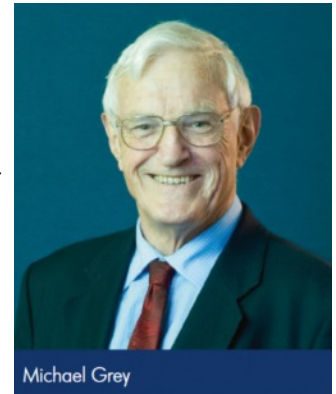


# Damned if you do ...

**The Maritime Advocate online Issue 790 November 5th 2021**

By Michael Grey

In this world where virtue-signalling competes with the need to blame everyone, maybe we should not be surprised at the growing enthusiasm to second-guess somebody else's decision-making. The dogs of blame are clearly out for the master of the 4526teu *Zim Kingston*, which lost some 100 boxes over the side in heavy weather off the coast of British Columbia, with commentators and low-ranked coastguards appearing to be surprised that the ship did not shelter from the approaching storm, rather than tough it out in the Pacific. And as more boxes or their contents drift up on the shoreline, one would not be surprised to see the poor old master ending up in court for his decision making.



Cases like this bring back memories of the way in which blame invariably attaches to the people who are in the decision-making hot seat, while everyone in management who might have put him there escapes any retribution. "There is always some b..... who knows better than me, even though I have more than forty years at sea and nearly thirty in command" I recall an exasperated senior officer declaiming from the podium at a conference I once attended. He received a good round of applause, although I expect some blighter in the back of the hall was marking him down as a trouble-maker.


I can look back further to the words of one the best shipmasters I ever sailed with, who seemed unusually downcast as he drank his evening cocoa with me as he wrote up his night orders. Normally the very soul of cheerfulness, he said he had been reading an account of an inquiry into a collision in fog in which the master of one of the ships, who had lost his daughter in the crash, has subsequently been censured and had his certificate suspended. "Whatever you do, Mister, somebody is going to blame you, because hindsight is a wonderful thing". In the same gloomy mood, he went on to say that if he was unfortunate enough ever to lose a ship, he would "make sure he went down in her". He was a lovely chap, but while he never did have a serious accident, he did not enjoy his retirement for very long.

So, whatever the logbooks aboard the *Zim* containership might record, they will now be picked over to discover what better alternatives the master might have chosen, to keep his boxes safe aboard as the storm approached. Should he have sought some safe anchorage? But would the anchorage be indeed safe, with the amount of windage of a laden containership? And surely it is a very natural reaction, on a ship which was designed for ocean-going, and not a tiny coaster, to stay well clear of a rocky coast, with plenty of sea room for manoeuvre. But whatever he did, it will inevitably be judged wrong, and there will be plenty of critics coming forward. The chances are he will get the blame if it is discovered that the lashing points might be a trifle worn on the 13 year old workhorse. Was the crew out checking the lashings, every minute of the passage? There will surely be plenty of scope for blame – there always is.

Sadly, in the media, in the general public and often in a lot of shore-side management, there is a lack of comprehension about what it is actually like to run big ships at sea. Sometimes you get the impression that they all believe a big ship handles with the precision of a small car, no matter what weather she might be in. I see the people investigating the burst pipeline that recently spilt oil on the Californian beaches are busy trawling through AIS records for the past year, to try and find some wretched shipmaster to blame.

I don't know that was advertised as one of the primary uses of this device, when it first appeared, but dragging an anchor tends to be viewed as a potential crime, no matter how extreme the weather or what we used to call the "quality of the bottom". It never occurs to anyone that those who fail to properly bury cables and pipelines sufficiently might have some small responsibility, if their vulnerability is exposed by an anchor or trawl. And while the needs of ships invariably seem to come well behind the demands of those positioning offshore rigs, wind turbines and the like, it wouldn't hurt for them to be rather more "precautionary" in their approach.

But the ships are invariably in the wrong, possibly because they are manned by foreigners and fly funny flags. I am trying to avoid any reference to the great doom-laden enviro-fest in Glasgow, where the contribution of the world fleet "to global warming" will be under review. But I did note there was some reptile this morning complaining that the two big Baltic ferries moored in the Clyde for accommodation were disgracefully running their diesel generators, polluting the pristine air. Greta will not be amused.

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## In Remembrance



With the resumption of the Remembrance Parade in Whitehall in November, some attention was focused, on social media and elsewhere, on those who perished at sea and have no known grave. Many websites feature poems on the theme and Barry Peck 'flagged' up the one on the left.

Honorary Cachalot Edwina Smart found the one below on Facebook and thought it rather beautiful.

It is called "**In Waters Deep**" and was written in 2001 by Eileen Mahoney when she was 90.

Of the many websites featuring it, one such worth visiting is *Classic Sailor*, [Click here](#)

In ocean wastes no poppies blow,  
No crosses stand in ordered row,  
There young hearts sleep... beneath the wave...  
The spirited, the good, the brave,  
But stars a constant vigil keep,  
For them who lie beneath the deep.  
'Tis true you cannot kneel in prayer  
On certain spot and think. "He's there."  
But you can to the ocean go...  
See whitecaps marching row on row;  
Know one for him will always ride...  
In and out... with every tide.  
And when your span of life is passed,  
He'll meet you at the "Captain's Mast."  
And they who mourn on distant shore  
For sailors who'll come home no more,  
Can dry their tears and pray for these  
Who rest beneath the heaving seas...  
For stars that shine and winds that blow  
And whitecaps marching row on row.  
And they can never lonely be  
For when they lived... they chose the sea.

My own favourite is this one which is attributed, somewhat ironically, to a German song:

There are no flowers on a sailors grave  
No lilies on an ocean wave  
The only tribute is the seagulls sweep  
And the tear drop on a loved ones cheek.

## Poets' Corner

Continuing on a poetic theme, regular contributor Barrie Youde reports on an exciting development in the world of verse:

Until recently it had been said that the last poet to make any money from poetry was Tennyson. Yesterday The Times reported that a young woman, writing under the pseudonym Arch Hades, had sold a poem for \$525,000 dollars at Christies in New York.

### VANITY DIVINE.

If I could sell some poetry at Christie's , in New York,  
I'd be so pleased that, certainly, I'd be hard pressed to talk.  
The thrill! The recognition! That some written words of mine  
Might show a value at such level. Vanity divine!

The Thoughts of Chairman Mao were handed out, to teach the masses.  
The Gideons leave The Bible where they know the traveller passes;  
Without a thought for fiscal gain from anything yet written.  
Such altruism wonderfully preaches to the smitten.

As well it might; for those who will accept and will believe;  
At liberty of thought; and will ignore those who deceive.  
What might the poet do? - Except to write his own amusement,  
The words which spring to mind - the simple record of his choosement,

Free of any forced restriction, ban or prohibition.  
The liberty to speak is perquisite of man's condition.  
Speak up, gentle readers! Ventilate what you are thinking!  
Let not inhibition bind you. Still not, excess drinking!

Speak! And put your thoughts in verse, to be enjoyed by all!  
One day New York might bow to you (you never know!) in thrall,  
Having penned your bons mots, your sagacity sublime,  
Your prospects for the global prize are prospects in good time.

BY

16.11.21

Undaunted by the lack of a huge cheque winging his way, Barrie continues to entertain us, mainly on a nautical slant.

### SWINGING THE LAMP

I must go down to the sea again, as once every schoolboy would cry!  
After holiday trips and visits to ships, he knew where his future should lie,  
On the high sea and the broad sea and the channels and bays and the ocean,  
On a wide deck of no high tech, but rolling and pitching and motion.

I must go down to the sea again, and soon I will be Second Mate,  
Of a fine ship and a Line ship, and soon will have tales to relate,  
Of voyages far, and a tropical bar, a knowledge of trade geographic;  
And the limits of load and the Rule of the Road in the heaviest maritime traffic.

I must go down to the sea again. I'll be Master, sole, after God,  
In the ways of mankind and the trade and the grind and I'll walk where my forefathers trod.  
In a fine ship and a Line ship, I'll live out my life as I oughter.  
And this I will do. To myself I'll be true. And I'll do it come Hell or High Water.

I must go down to the sea again, to see where the Liners have gone?  
Alas, overnight, they have vanished from sight, it would seem just about every one.  
And box-boats and bulkers and chemical hulkers now carry the trade that I knew.  
Each fog-horn and bell, I remember them well. I remember them. How about you?

BY

23.11.21

## Badly out of tune

**The Maritime Advocate online Issue 791 Nov. 19th 2021**

*By Michael Grey*

**I**t is funny how different items of news mesh with each other. Cop 26 is over, thank goodness and the thousands of delegates have jetted off to their homelands, leaving a heavy smell of jetfuel over Argyll, but what we are learning to call “the supply chain problem” remains. A queue of big containerships is a permanent feature outside ports in the US, Asia, and to a certain degree, Europe. And now there is angst about the exhaust fumes from the massed fleets of big ships either lying to their anchors, or steaming around in circles, waiting for a berth to become available. It is, so activists around the ports aver, a reprise of the “diesel death zone” crisis - a term which Californians used to draw attention to their air quality. Nobody ever dared to suggest that the deaths might be contributed to by obesity and a lack of exercise.

It is quite difficult to know what sea carriers ought to be doing. They can hardly shut down their generators and wallow around like dead ships with all the lights out, or dawdle across the Pacific with the machinery barely turning over, because they have to go like the clappers to get in the queue in the first place.

I was talking to a former stevedore about the problem and he was adamant that none of the difficulties were being caused in the ports, which have been getting rather too much flak from stupid politicians and ignorant people who rage about their Christmas goods not expected to turn up until next Easter. He has no hesitation in blaming accountants for the mess we are in, because of a whole generation of financial folk who have turned against the idea of carrying any stocks of absolutely anything.

You can see what he means if you go to your supermarket and finding an empty shelf, ask the manager if the missing item might be available “in the back store-room”? Once upon a time the manager would despatch a minion to rummage around in the cardboard boxes and at least 50% of the time he or she would have returned triumphantly. Today, you are wasting your time even asking because the stuff barely draws breath between its arrival on the truck and its being put on the shelf. There isn't a store-room either as that would have been defined as non-earning space. It was all part of the fashionable “just in time” philosophy, that saw so much storage space and warehouse volume scrapped.


It worked pretty well, just as long as every link in the logistics chain performed as required. The raw materials that fed the manufacturing process arrived just when they were needed, and the finished goods were stuffed into a container and instantly carried to the port for a speedy sea crossing, minimum dwell time in the arrival port and fast despatch to their ultimate destination. What could possibly go wrong, with ports equipped with amazing cargo-handling equipment, speedy and reliable ships and on land, all the trucks and barges and trains that were needed to keep the system purring along?

Before we even get into pandemics and their effects, we might throw a little of the blame for the eventual mess on the sea carriers, who were persuaded by their accountant-infested managements looking at their awful results to build colossal ships. This was not an incremental increase that could be coped with by any energetic port management, but ships with a capacity up to a third bigger than the ships they were replacing. It was all about unit costs, said the number crunchers, pointing to the wonderful logic that told them a 23000teu ship could actually make them a profit, where two 12,000teu ships would not.

It seemed a great idea, but ports and inland carriers, which had honed their systems around a certain steady throughput through their terminals suddenly found that they were overwhelmed one minute and idle the next. There had to be somewhere to put these huge shiploads before the trucks and trains and barges could take the stuff away. A terminal which could see a box off its premises in just over three days, now saw this time double. Congestion suddenly raised its ugly head.

Then came the pandemic and its resultant chaos which exacerbated all the problems of “supersized” ships tenfold. And one feature that became manifestly clear was that the pre-pandemic system was so finely tuned for its optimum performance that the smallest glitch could have widespread effects that quickly became global. There was no elasticity in the system, because that was seen by the all-seeing bean-counters as “waste”. So when some factory in the depths of a continent had failed to empty its boxes in time for them to be taken away for use by somebody else, the consequences, like the draught from that butterfly's wings, would be felt far and wide.

You might argue that everyone has been doing their utmost to restore “normal service”, but the fact is that the conjoined problems, of insufficient storage, not enough land transport and a vast demand for post-pandemic consumption, have defeated the best of intentions. Now, with universal disappointment, everyone is looking for someone to blame. There is rage about sea carrier's profits, anger about perceived poor port performance and a good deal of ignorance about the continuing effects of Covid in Asian logistic systems. People living on the coast are now complaining about the sea air having a whiff of fuel oil about it. Now there is a lot of talk about “on-shoring” and not relying on the manufacture of your widgets on the other end of a 12,000mile sea route. Like the consequences of all those Cop26 “pledges” in Glasgow, nobody has quite worked out what that might mean.

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## Annual General Meeting 1830 Thursday 13th January 2022

As indicated in my last couple of reports, subject to any possible Covid controls being introduced by our Dear Leader, the AGM for 2022 will be held in person at the RBL 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. Please advise me if you wish to attend in person or by Zoom. Please be reminded only members whose subscriptions are paid up for 2022 are eligible to attend, in person or by Zoom.

Rule 4 of the Cachalot Rules 2013 state 'at least six Committee Members (Harpooners) shall be elected at an AGM' and serve a term of two years. Further, Rule 8 states 'Harpooners will retire after two years but will be eligible for re-election'.

The following six Harpooners are coming to the end of their term:  
Noel Becket, Terry Clark, Douglas Gates, Peter Gould, Les Morris and Mark Oakley.

All members whose subscription are fully paid at the date of the AGM are encouraged to stand for election, providing a proposer and seconder. Where necessary a ballot will be held at the AGM. As we already have one Harpooner in place, we only need to fill five places although the Rules allow for 'at least six Harpooners'.

In 'normal' times, any vote of candidates would be completed by those members attending the AGM in person. We will allow votes to be cast by indicating their vote using the Chat facility to Robin Plumley, available on the Zoom application.

If you wish to continue in your role as a Harpooner, or seek to become a Harpooner, please submit your proposal with the name of your proposer and seconder to the Boatsteerer no later than 24th December 2021.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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

### 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.







# Eyes off the ball

## **Seatrade Maritime Opinion and Analysis November 2021**

*By Michael Grey*

**I**t was entirely predictable that in the afterglow of the great Glaswegian enviro-fest, besides questions about whether the final outcome represented more fudge than progress, others should have asked whether the whole circus was a distraction from more urgent and immediate issues facing the world. Was it right that world leaders should be spending their waking hours worrying about square brackets in a climate change document, when the pandemic has not ended its grip on so many of their countries?

And shouldn't rather more attention have been paid to the security situation on the border between Poland and Belarus, tensions in the Taiwan Straits and instability in the middle east and Africa, as important folk jostled for podium space in a Scottish arena. No doubt about it, as the virtuous signalled and the activists howled, the significant absentees were getting on with what they thought was more pressing? Cop 26 might be important for the long-term health of the planet, and it is heretical to suggest otherwise, but a popular cause among politicians shouldn't deflect them from practical and immediate problems that won't go away. You can argue that it did.

And we might make the same observations about the shipping industry, which arguably has been spending too much time on "decarbonisation" problems that won't be solved overnight, when there are far more urgent issues that need attention. Despite all sorts of virtuous words about ships' crews being worthy of "special status" when it comes to quarantine, vaccinations and their needs for leave and relief, in too many countries these worthy statements have not amounted to much. And if regulators and officials see that global attention is focussed on global warming, they continue to believe that the ships will keep on sailing, facilitating their imports and exports, just as they have always done.

It may be unfair on diligent officialdom, but the chances are that in too many places they will be keener on prosecuting captains whose ships emit too much funnel smoke, than worrying about whether the crew are enabled to get to the airport at the end of their contracts. There will be plenty of attention given to "bio-fouling" problems, and the oil record book, but is there anyone to ask whether there are crew members quietly suffering serious mental problems after months trapped in their steel box for half a year or more and unable to set foot ashore? Seafarers are no different from other people and just like populations in those countries whose governments have decided on policies to eradicate Covid-19 rather than learn to treat it as an endemic disease, they are losing patience.

And amid all the urgent introspection about whether ammonia, hydrogen, methanol or used fish and chip fat will do the business in the future, is anyone asking what the consequences of effective sensory deprivation on a million seafarers is likely to be? Are they likely to be rushing back when and if they manage to get home on leave, and recommend others to their bleak state-imposed lifestyle? I cannot think that they will just dismiss their treatment as an aberration or an unfortunate glitch in their maritime careers, rather than find a more kindly alternative. And what about supply-chain crises – just another on long list of pressing problems that the marine industry won't solve on its own. We could go on....

You are unlikely to persuade anyone who attended Cop26 in Glasgow that their journey (whether offset or not) was not absolutely necessary, but it is maybe important to keep a sense of perspective among the hype. One news item they probably wouldn't have read on the Clyde was that while their deliberations had been progressing, Russian icebreakers were in action, with some 20 ocean-going ships been trapped off the coast of Siberia by the unexpected early onset of heavy ice. Unpredictable thing, climate.

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## Cachalots and Messmates

*Here is another interesting excerpt, in our occasional series, from "A Brief History of The Southampton Master Mariners' Club", written by Commodore D.M. MacLean, DSC, RD, RNR, and published in 1973. It has been published here before, in edition 22 of December 2006, under the title "Here there be monsters"*

11th July 1972. By way of implementing the friendly aims of the Club, the author visited the Club's oldest surviving member, Captain C. H. Watson, O.B.E., on this, his 91st birthday, and found him "Hale and hearty from yardarm to yardarm".

He joined the Club in its foundation year, 1928, and although never an Officer of it he has always been a staunch supporter. Captain Watson (or "Charlie" as he is affectionately called) joined the Southampton Pilotage service in 1912 and retired from it in 1952, having been "Choice" Pilot for both Canadian Pacific and Union Castle lines for many years.

His memory goes back to the old sailing Pilot-Cutter days; and long before the oil refinery and storage tanks appeared on Southampton Water. "We were constantly on the move, piloting all kinds of steam and sailing craft in my young days," he declared, before releasing a flood of interesting anecdotes about his early seafaring days.

Flicking through the faded pages of an old Seaman's Discharge Book, he showed me, with a smile, one engagement entry for the year 1900 which read: "Rating: Second Cook" of Steam Yacht *KEMPION*, engaged in cruising in the Norwegian Fjords. Rate of pay £7 per month.

During this period, Charlie explained, the shipping economy of this country was at a very low ebb. Officers with Master Mariner's Certificates were serving in ships' forecables - glad to be in a job of any kind.

But one of his proudest memories is, that when he was 19 he served as Able Seaman on board King Edward VII's graceful yacht, *BRITANNIA*, in her exciting racing heyday. His principal duties aboard *BRITANNIA* were "Mainsheet-and-Backstays-man", when racing; and, more important, he was always directly responsible for the personal safety of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra whenever she was embarked in the Royal Yacht.

Among the more unusual experiences which Charlie related to me was the following incident.

Shortly after leaving *BRITANNIA* he signed on as Able Seaman in the well-known 1,300 ton full-rigged ship-yacht *VALHALLA*, owned by Lord Crawford. One morning in the spring of 1902 in mid-Indian Ocean while on passage in her from Aden to Singapore an incident occurred which left an indelible impression on Charlie's youthful memory. The crew were working about the decks in their usual manner when the helmsman reported a sail well out on the starboard bow, whereupon the skipper, Captain John Caws, was promptly called and *VALHALLA* bore away to close the object, and Charlie went aloft into the fore rigging in order to get a better view.

Before long all hands and the Cook had mustered by the lee rail after someone had said something about the "queer-ness" and the absence of any kind of movement around the reported sail.

Hearing the unusual commotion on deck, Lord Crawford, together with the two eminent scientists who were his guests on board, hastened to the fore-deck and, as the ship closed to within about 20 feet of the strange object, it was clearly seen to be a mottled dark brown coloured fish (or mammal) of

reptilian form and about 25 feet in length with a serrated dorsal fin of about three or four feet in height, and a proportionate snake-like head. It somehow gave the impression of being old, but at the same time, of immense and sinister power, and there was an uncanny feeling about disturbing the monster's apparent unaware-ness of their presence; it seemed as if it were dozing in the morning sunshine.

There was very little wind and *VALHALLA*, under sail, made hardly a ripple at her bow. This might possibly have accounted for the creature's lack of awareness of the ship's proximity.

Presently Lord Crawford ordered his valet to fetch his elephant-gun, but by the time the weapon was loaded the awesome creature had reared its head and slowly dived into the depths. It probably had been disturbed when the shadow of *VALHALLA*'S sails fell across it or possibly by the now closer sound of her bow-wave, faint though the latter was.

As a sort of postscript to his story Captain Watson added that while watching a television programme a few years ago he was very surprised to hear the above incident sketchily described but mentioning the name of his old ship, *VALHALLA*. The programme also included a report of a sighting of a marine monster by a Naval vessel in the Indian Ocean some time around the same era.

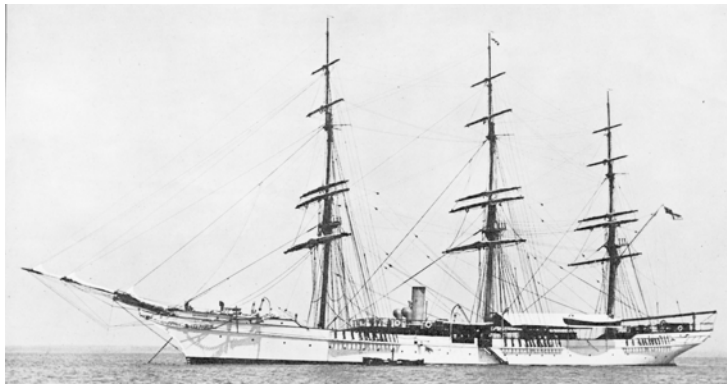
After obtaining his Master's Certificate in 1907 he got command of Sir Frederick Preston's famous sailing yacht, *MODWENA* and, judging from his colourful accounts of his various cruises in her he must have been a very competent and resourceful seaman.

Paradoxically enough, although *MODWENA* was a purely sailing vessel and therefore without engines or propeller, her owner's wealth derived from the manufacture of ship's propellers! Sir Frederick,

at that time, was Chairman of the world-famous Stone's Propeller Foundry at Deptford.

When asked for his recipe for health and longevity Charlie replied: "I eat well; and always keep a ball of well-tarred spunyarn by my bedside; it keeps off bronchitis and 'flu germs.'"!

He now lives in happy retirement tending his attractive little garden by the river Hamble.



The auxiliary full-rigged ship-yacht, *VALHALLA*, owned by Lord Crawford, in which Charlie Watson served as an A.B. in 1902.

*Photo by Beken & Son, Cowes*

*I could find very little information of the VALHALLA on the internet but at*

[www.strangemag.com/definitiveseaserpent.html](http://www.strangemag.com/definitiveseaserpent.html) there is an account of the sighting by the two scientists on board. They were Michael J. Nicholl and E.G.B. Meade-Waldo, both experienced British naturalists and Fellows of the Zoological Society of London. They date the sighting as Dec.7 1905 at 1015 am and put it at 15 miles east of the mouth of Brazil's Parahiba River. Their account is recorded in the 1906 edition of the Society's Proceedings and in Nicoll's 1908 book "Three Voyages of A Naturalist."

*There is also very scant information with regard to the MODWENA or of Sir Frederick Preston. Ed.*



## Captain Ken

*Another contribution from Ken Owen which appeared in his local Mellor Church Parish magazine "Outlook" of October 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 and it can be read online at <https://mellorchurch.org/outlook-magazine/>*

In the late nineteen sixties I sailed several voyages as Chief Officer of the Blue Funnel cargo liner *Laomedon*. Whereas most of our fleet ran between the UK and the Far East or Australia, *Laomedon* was engaged in a service named The Blue Sea Line. This was a joint service with The Swedish South East Asia Company and De La Rama Company of the Philippines.

The ship was based in New York and sailed on a service from U.S. ports and was east-bound round the world to the Far East, and back to New York. We would load and discharge a variety of cargoes in each port at which we called, and to handle all the various cargoes, we employed a great many dockworkers, known in the USA as longshoremen. They would be divided into gangs of up to a dozen men.



On one occasion during my frequent rounds to check the cargo operations, I encountered a serious accident, when one gang member stumbled and fell some 10 feet in to an open hatchway. He appeared to be quite badly injured, so we gave him first aid, lifted him out of the hatch in a special stretcher and arranged for an ambulance to take him to hospital.

Following standard procedure, I arranged for all those who were present at the accident to make their individual statements which I then forwarded to our Insurance department.

Before we set sail on our world trip following that accident I was assured by our agents that the casualty involved had been discharged from hospital and that all was OK.

However, several months later when I was home on leave I received a telephone call from our Company Head Office. They informed me that the American longshoreman involved in the accident had unexpectedly died and his Union were claiming a vast amount of money due to the negligence of the ship owners. I was then requested to fly to New York the following day to attend court as a star witness.

Whilst reviewing the relevant papers as I flew over the Atlantic on my way to the trial, I was horrified to note that all the longshoremen concerned had rewritten their statements and were putting all the blame on our Company. However, they were fortunately unaware that I had personally witnessed the accident and was in a very strong position to refute their claim.

The pre-trial hearing which I attended was just like a Hollywood movie. Luckily, the three attorneys involved were kind to me, but horrible to each other. Fortunately, I managed to convince them that the ship's staff had done their very best to keep the ship safe and had complied with all the required safety measures. When, of course, I pointed out that I was present at the time of the accident and that the unfortunate longshoreman had simply lost his balance and had not tripped on anything negligently present at the time, the case turned financially in our favour.

Finally, the opposing attorney asked me to name the ports of call on that particular voyage, as I had not produced the Log Book. This of course was easy for me as I was responsible for the entire loading and discharge so I reeled off New York, Port Said, Aden, Penang, Port Kelang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Manila, Cebu, Zamboanga, Kure, Bussan, Kobe, Nagoya, Moji, Yokohama, Panama, Cristobal, Kingston, Halifax, Boston, Newark, Baltimore, Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, Jacksonville, Port Everglades, Miami, Galveston, Houston, New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Gulfport and New York. When I finished, his response was, 'Sounds like a good trip. Wish I'd been with you.'

After the hearing, I flew straight home to continue my leave and my wife Allwyn picked me up at Manchester Airport. Her first words of greeting were suggesting that we call via Stockport market where some good value-pet food was available and we did have three dogs and five cats at the time. (I would add that Ken and Allwyn do live on the most delightful old farm cottage with acres of land and barns and fortunately for Mr Editor, a fridge full of ales. Ed)

As I later struggled in the rain carrying the heavy cases of dog food. I obviously got a bit deep in thought and Allwyn asked me what I was thinking. I said it was just occurring to me that only a few hours earlier, I had eaten a fine lunch in the famed Manhattan Downtown Athletic Club and had then been transported in a stretch Cadillac to the first class airport reception lounge and got a first class flight home. 'Oh,' she said, 'Well, you have come down in the world, haven't you?'

## Captain Ken

*Here is Ken's piece that appeared in the November edition of "Outlook" and which brings us up to date.*

In the nineteen fifties and sixties, the Blue Funnel Line, in which I was serving, was the major cargo liner company serving the Far East. Besides our newly built liners at that time, we had many wartime built Liberty ships, known as Sam boats, which had been purchased (from Uncle Sam) to replace half of all our former fleet which had been sunk by enemy action.

November Remembrance day is an appropriate time to remember that the Merchant Navy lost half of its ships and a quarter of its men in the last world war, a proportion higher than any of the other Service.

This month is also the eightieth anniversary of the Outward Bound Trust. In the early days of the war, Lawrence Holt, head of the Blue Funnel Line, had noted that a great many young seafarers were being lost at sea after their ship had been sunk, due to difficulties in dealing with lifeboats. He contacted Kurt Hahns, Headmaster of Gordonstoun School (which Prince Charles attended) who had moved from Scotland, where an invasion was expected, to North Wales, and asked him to organise the Aberdovey Outward Bound Sea School which taught how to handle small boats in severe weather. Lawrence Holt ensured that all newcomers joining his ships attended that Outward Bound course, and from that day on no deaths occurred of any person from a sinking ship who had managed to reach the ship's lifeboats.

We often utilised our Sam boats to load bulk cargo, such as copra, the dried kernel of the coconut, which was prevalent in Indonesia, Borneo and Celebes where we could anchor off the ports of these small islands and use the Sam boats. Before embarking on the above, however, we would have to go to the port of Makassar and take on a labour force, known as Bajos, who would set up their tents on the main deck of our ship and cook their meals on open fires on the deck. Their lavatory was a wooden structure hanging over the side and was referred to as The Thunder-Box.

We were, however, always apprehensive about this temporary labour force, as they far outnumbered our ship's complement, and as Indonesia had just expelled their Dutch colonizers, they were not too friendly towards Europeans. In fact, they had recently murdered a ship's officer who had apprehended a man suspected of stealing. In view of this situation, our agents in Djakarta advised us to land our temporary labour force off Makassar, together with the lighters and tug-boats, and to leave Indonesia as soon as possible.

Boats came out to collect the labour force, but the tug boats refused to collect the lighters. Fortunately, as a young Midshipman aged 18, I had managed to tie the lighters together and attach them to the tugs which were now happily steaming towards the port where a huge riot seemed to be breaking out. Unfortunately, I was stranded in the last lighter. However, fortunately for me, my colleagues had managed to launch our ship's very fast petrol lifeboat, and rescued me just before we reached the hostile mob. We managed to weigh anchor and leave for the safety of Singapore. However, I distinctly remember being so thankful for my Outward Bound course which had virtually saved my life.

## 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.



## Build up the spares

What do we mean by ‘resilience’, which is a word currently on the lips of commentators? My Imperial Reference Dictionary, which admittedly was published before the days of business practice manuals, suggests ‘physical or mental elasticity’, which admirably describes much of what we require now. And at a time when even the mention of ‘just in time’ brings a hollow laugh from the listener, everyone needs to be a lot more elastic in thinking about what you do when that truck/van/container/delivery/ship does not turn up when it is expected.

I am old enough to remember when the Chief Engineer of a ship took tremendous pride in the volume of spares he had managed to accumulate during his time in charge. He could sleep at night comforted with the thought that whatever broke, wore or suffered terrible damage at the hands of the elements or his staff, it could be replaced from the stock neatly stowed away by the Storekeeper. The Mate was similarly seized with the need to keep the Boatswain’s and Lamp trimmer’s (you don’t see many of them these days) stores full of everything from vast quantities of rope to oceans of paint.

I have just been reading a wonderful book about the - Home Boats\*– the fleet of around 150 Commonwealth cargo liners that served New Zealand until the containers and the European Union combined to end this amazing dedicated trade. It contains a large number of reminiscences from those who served in these ships, including quite a lot by the engineers who kept their Doxfords and Sulzers and B&Ws ticking over, on the longest liner route in the world.

This was hard work, as these owners liked to keep their ships running for some 30 years or more, but reading these accounts you are reminded of just how self-sufficient their admittedly large, engineering staff were. It brought back memories of evenings in the bar, or saloon, when the engineers among us somehow detected a faltering beat in the harmony of the main engines, or a bit of tremolo in the hum of the generators. As one, and without anyone saying anything, they would put down their glasses or cutlery and melt away and a couple of minutes later, the lights would dim, alarms sound and the engines would cough to a standstill.

And there was almost nothing that would faze these folk, with these large and complex lumps of machinery to be kept in trim on a 12,000 mile sea passage. And while we on deck minced around in our uniforms, or enjoyed the delights of the coast, the engineering staff would spend days in their blackened boiler suits pulling units, re-aligning machinery, scraping out the carbon from crankcase fires and completely rebuilding huge engines. It was unknown, or fantastically rare, that the necessary spares were not readily available from the treasures accumulated by the Chief Engineers down through the long lives of these ships. And if by some appalling problem, there was no

spare part available, well, there was the talent on-board to make it. This, if you like, was resilience on steroids.

But somehow, possibly as the bean counters gravitated from the basement to the executive floor in the shipping company, the notion of maintaining sufficient spare parts against anticipated need was eroded. Some thrusting young accountant had read a book of business strategies in an airport and concluded that spares were a cost that could be saved and the poisonous notion spread like a case of COVID-19 in a rancid night club. Soon, the letters were winging out to senior officers around the world demanding that these treasure troves of spares be run down or ‘monetised’ with replacement henceforth being provided as needed. Moreover, it was possible, some seer had worked out, to buy spares that were not made by the manufacturer of the equipment, but sourced from some Arthur Daly like organisation that were marked cheaper. Another substantial saving! What a winner!

As you can imagine, this all went down like a lead balloon among thoughtful folk in engine control rooms around the world, and it was not long afterwards that you started to hear of some of the plainly obvious consequences. Repairs, which might be expedited in hours by a diligent repair yard, if not by the ship’s staff, would take days as the necessary spares had to be flown from the other side of the world. One particularly memorable account was of a tanker which had her spare propeller removed and then because of that never-failing law, needed it herself. This was not something that could be bought off the shelf, but had to be made out of a great lump of manganese bronze, from a firm which was shut down for its summer holidays. The weeks drew into months, as the ship remained idle.

Nobody ever computed all the costs of the cancellation clauses invoked by angry charterers, the costs of flying things all around the world and indeed the costs of delays. The only cost which ever registered was the notional savings made from not having all those spares hanging around in case they were needed.

Life in general mirrors the maritime world and people other than marine engineers are seeing the consequences of not having any worthwhile stocks of just about anything, such as the JIT mentality lasered itself into the global village. This was being written in early October and I am reading that frozen turkeys are flying off the shelves (an alarming analogy) as folk anticipate shortages for Christmas. The children’s toys are sitting on a darkened quayside in China waiting to find their way onto the hundred or so containerships anchored off in the South China Sea. If I had a bit of spare money I would invest in warehouses, to house all the goods that it would be good to have handy, when the boat doesn’t come in.

\*Check out ‘Home Boats’ by Nick Tolerton at [www.coastalshipping.com](http://www.coastalshipping.com)

## Pile 'em high

Looking at pictures of the latest heavily laden containerships that have actually made it from the Far East to North Europe, with the world's biggest Evergreen displaying 10 high on deck, it is probably timely to make a confident prediction. With the world still 'rebalancing', after the trade eccentricities of the pandemic, and the northern winter just around the corner, I would suggest that we will see something of a repeat of last season, when the largest number of piled-high boxes ever, ended up in the drink.

You might say that we have learned from these experiences about how to mitigate these losses, but indeed what have we learned? We still put locking bars on the lowest three to six tiers, leaving all those on top to the tender mercies of twistlocks. There are still inadequate checks on weights, on stowage of the boxes themselves and the state of these steel containers when they arrive in the terminal. We are probably unsure of the exact contents, since the more cavalier shippers are unlikely to have changed their spots.

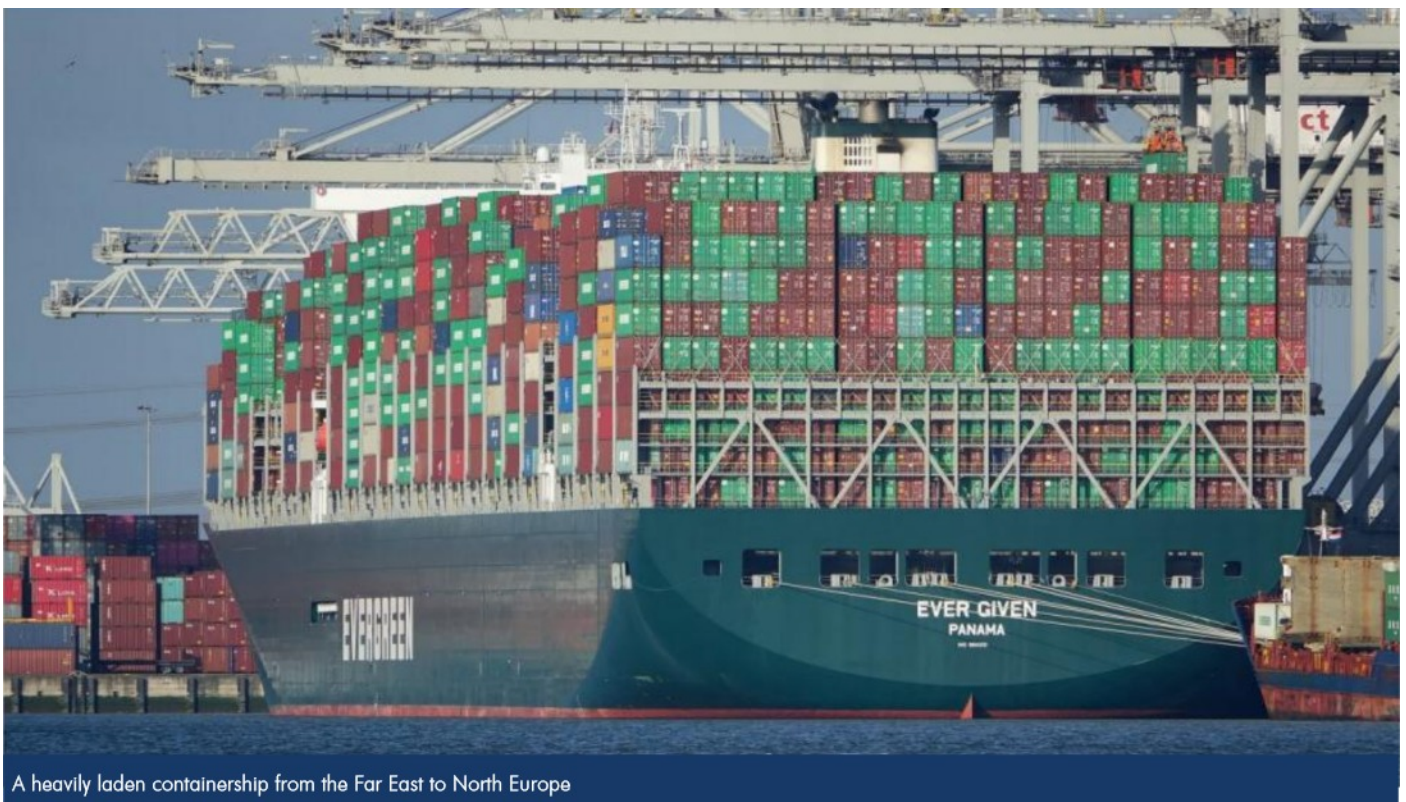
We may have all sorts of wonderful weather forecasts and even devices that tell the master if he is going to face hazardous rolling, but the more horrible experiences, I'm told, tend to happen at night, when there may be little warning for the OOW. We might confidently forecast that somebody will inevitably blame the master for the loss and damage, while opportunists will spring forward to claim the loss as just another victim of 'climate change'. What nobody will agree is that it might be prudent, during the winter in North Atlantic and Pacific, to stop piling the cargo quite so high. We can't have that!

## Gold from dross

Alchemists in medieval times attempted to derive the elixir of life, or more practically, to turn base metals into gold and you sometimes feel their craft is making something of a comeback. All around the world we see scientists working overtime to produce carbon-neutral fuels that will keep industry alive while satisfying the impossible desires of the more extreme greens.

There are teams of micro-biologists who are attempting scale up experiments that will produce something you can stuff into an engine from the green slime that annoys the fish in your goldfish ponds. We already have ships that are burning a type of bio-diesel that has emerged from the waste that emerges from fish and chip shops. And one surprising development, after months of being told that CO<sub>2</sub> is something that menaces the world, is that there is a company which uses it as feedstock for a process that will turn it into gasoline, jet fuel or diesel. This would appear to be alchemy in operation, except that Maersk, no less has an interest in this exciting process. Mind you, as with everything else these days, there has been a shortage of CO<sub>2</sub>, causing extreme alarm among those industries – more than fizzy drinks – which depend upon its bubbles for their processes.

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



A heavily laden containership from the Far East to North Europe

## Gone Aloft

The following members have  
Gone Aloft since August 2021.

**R.S. Olden, 23 Sept '21**

**P.J. Sara, 14 Oct '21**

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

## 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, December 11th 2021**

~ Voyages & Visits from the archive ~ with Bill Mayes ~  
... From a collection of over 60,000 shipping images scanned from slides –  
we get to see Bill's "special selection" ...

Bill moved from prints to transparencies during 1977 and we will see images from the first decade of slides including some ship visits organised by the London Branch of the WSS and those arranged independently, Falklands activity in Southampton, and a special selection of images from 1984 featuring the first Astor, World Renaissance, the first St Helena, Royal Princess, Norway, QE2 and MTS Jason. Expect to see some ships in dry dock in Southampton and maybe a few random images.

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.