

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 97 Printer Friendly Digital Edition February 2022

With the Sea Pie Supper just days away, all hands are busy with its preparation and this edition is another thin one. However, we didn't want you to miss out on your monthly fix of Michael Grey so I have included all four of his contributions that I have on file. Michael writes for several maritime publications, aiming at slightly different audiences, and his observations and unfailing ability to elucidate the issues besetting the marine industry make him second to none as a maritime commentator.

We hope to get back to normal next month when it will be the quarterly printed edition.

Those attending the SPS on Friday are reminded that all the latest information, including Covid advice, can be found on our website, or here: <http://www.cachalots.org.uk/events/sea-pie-supper/> - Ed

Boatsteerer's Locker

Greetings to all, it is all go at the moment with preparations for the forthcoming Sea Pie Supper. By the time you read this the last chance for tickets will have passed!

It seems the Dear Leader has heard our call and most if not, all restrictions will have been removed. Along with falling cases the future is looking brighter for our events in 2022.

We will continue to keep the Club room active as far as possible and will consider the opportunity to open up on a Thursday. This will be discussed at our next meeting of the management committee in March. However, it will depend on the likelihood of members attending as we experience additional costs in doing so. Please let me know if you feel this is a good idea and that you will use the club room on a Thursday.

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 but I have had issues with the system timing out. 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!!!

Annual General Meeting

This meeting was held on Thursday 13th January with nine members attending in person and seventeen members joining us through the wonders of Zoom. The meeting lasted about one hour and minutes are posted on the Club room noticeboard and are available on the Cachalot website.

Functions

A Burn's Night Supper was enjoyed by twenty-three members on Thursday 20th January 2022 at the RBL main room.

After the Sea Pie Supper, the next event will be a visit to **Kuti's** for a curry lunch at 1300 on Saturday 19th February 2022. Unfortunately, like other establishments, they have increased the cost which will be £32 per person. I am sure they haven't lowered the excellent quality of the food, service and friendliness. There will be a sheet on the noticeboard in the Club but otherwise please let John Noble functions@cachalots.org.uk or Robin Plumley boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk if you wish to attend and if you will be bring spouse, partner or guest.

Shipping Festival Service

A date for your diary. This year we will be arranging the Shipping Festival Service at St. Michael's Church in Southampton on Thursday 9th June at 1900. The format will follow similar to those held in previous years.

Enjoy your February.

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE

Boatsteerer

boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk

Curry Lunch

KUTI'S ROYAL PIER

“Officially the Best Indian Restaurant in the UK”

The first Curry Lunch of the new year has been booked there on

Saturday 19th February
1230 for 1300 (Note the new time)

The price will be **£32** per person, including a gratuity.

Book, and pay, through the office a.s.a.p. please.

As far as we are aware, parking at Mayflower park is still
2 hours for £1 or 4 hours for £2.

Future Curry Lunches are projected for
30th April, 25th June and 13th August,
all at Kuti's.

Officers of the Club and Committee Members for 2022

CAPTAIN	Captain M. Phipps MBE
STAFF CAPTAIN	Captain N. S. Becket
BOATSTEERER	Captain R. Plumley MBE
STOREKEEPER	Captain I. Odd
POST CAPTAIN	Captain A. Moll
Hon. MEMBERSHIP OFFICER	Captain D. Gates
Hon. EDITOR	Captain T.E. Clark
Hon. FUNCTIONS OFFICER	Captain J. Noble
Hon. BURSARY OFFICER	Captain J. Mileusnic
Hon. CHAPLAIN	Rev'd J. Attenborough

HARPOONERS:

T.E. Clark, D. Gates, J.M. Noble, L.R. Morris,
M.L. Oakley, J. Whorwood

The cut-off date for the next edition will be
18th February 2022

250 Club

December (£100)	J Lockhead	L R Morris
January	W J M Hargreaves	D P Neaves

Burns Supper

A very select group of twenty-three Cachalots and their guests braved it to the Burns Supper on the 20th January.

After the Selkirk Grace and a nourishing bowl of Cullen Skink, the 'Beastie' was carried in by chef Sam preceded by Piper Jim Stanley. Past Captain John Noble followed swiftly behind and then 'addressed' the haggis with the aid of a sharp knife and a very few prompts from Piper Jim. After the traditional toast the eviscerated beastie was piped out and then served to the waiting throng.



Clap in his watie nieve a blade, he'll make it whistle;



"Slainte mhach"

After the Loyal Toast, Captain Andrew Moll gave us The Immortal Memory, with just the right amount of irreverence that it deserves.

He then called on Past Captain Lionel Hall to deliver the Toast to the Lassies, the fourteenth time in our twenty-one year history of this event that Lionel has done so. Other years he has presented The Immortal Memory or supervised the Sangs & Clatter. With all that experience he knows just how to hit the spot and didn't disappoint on this occasion.

Julia Whorwood didn't hold back in her response and gave our Past Captain and Boatsteerer as good as she got.

Before the raffle of a few Scottish delicacies, an un-eviscerated haggis, some shortcake and of course a bottle of Malt, a bouquet of flowers was presented to the Captain's Lady in recognition of, in this case, the two year loan of her husband to the exigencies of the Club. The raffle itself generated another welcome **£155** to the Captain's Charity.



There was little time left for any Sangs & Clatter, the piper having left after the Address to the Haggis, although he had treated us to 'Scotland the Brave' before he departed.

Your editor had downloaded, at no mean expense, the music to The National Anthem and Auld Lang Syne onto a small laptop and used this as a barely audible accompaniment to the singing of these two essential pieces to round off the evening. After we had unclasped our hands and applied copious amounts of hand sanitiser, Karen, who manages the bar at the RBL, said, "Why didn't you ask? We have both those pieces of music on our internal sound system."

Must plan harder next time.

Poet's Corner

It would seem as though our regular contributor Barrie Youde might also have been celebrating Burns Night with a wee dram!

JURA

Was ever there refreshment clear,
Or holier or purer,
Than that which doth inspire good cheer
And is produced at Jura?

When Orwell for his writing sat
There at his desk to scribe,
He no doubt venerated that
He knew man might imbibe.

He warned of Nineteen Eighty Four.
A forty year prediction.
Now been and gone, as days of yore,
Disguised as so much fiction.

Yet Jura clarified the truth
For Orwell to forecast.
It yet inspires eternal youth.
May no dram be the last.

The magic is but in the taste
As nectar to the brain.
Festina lente. Cause no waste.
And yours will be the gain!

BY

26.01.22

Experience is what counts

Baird Maritime Workboat World 24th November 2021
Grey Power



There is a rather sad letter from a member in the current issue of the Nautical Institute's Seaways magazine asking a question for which there does not appear to be an answer. The writer appears to be an officer who has found himself "beached" with thousands of others in the aftermath of the pandemic and is anxious to get back to work. But he finds that despite his statutory qualifications, the only thing that potential employers are interested in is his experience on a particular type of ship, and if he fails on this count, he is considered to be wholly unsuitable.

His question is perfectly reasonable, and I paraphrase: how can a seafarer acquire experience in a particular type of ship, if they are unable to access the employment that will provide this experience in the first place? It is a dilemma straight out of "Catch 22", or perhaps even "Alice in Wonderland". I'm afraid it is also a problem that shows up the marine employer in the worst possible light, at a crucial time when they really ought to be becoming exceptionally "seafarer- friendly". He also makes the point that seafarers are suitably qualified and certified to work on board *any* type of ship, which you cannot argue with. For their sins, a very long time ago, the old UK Board of Trade found me "duly qualified to fulfil the duties of Master of a foreign going ship in the Merchant Service..." They didn't restrict this to ships of a certain length, or vessels with red funnels.

Of course, we know that shipping is hugely more specialised these days and somebody off a capesize bulk carrier will have to go through an extensive learning period before being much use on a dynamically positioning diving support ship or the mate on a twin-pipe dredger. But, you might argue, that there badly needs to be some mechanism for that experience to be gained by people entering the trade or speciality for the first time. And as this correspondent notes, there jolly well isn't.

And it gets worse, as even if an officer somehow manages to leap all the hurdles and successfully gain a junior officer's post in the new speciality, progression through the ranks is not just a matter of experience. Because some blighter in a charterer's office is going to demand that all the senior officers (and sometime their juniors) have experience in that rank before the ship will be deemed fit to hire. First trip Chief Officer? Newly promoted Second Engineer? Sorry - the ship will be turned down until people sufficiently experienced in their rank have been appointed.

If you are a respectable and responsible shipowner or manager, you might angrily point out that you are the employers of these officers and it is your judgement that they are well-qualified and would not have been appointed had this not been the case. But you may just as well go and argue with the windlass. The remit of the pre-charter inspector, which once was confined to the structure and maintenance of the ship, now has been amplified to take in the experience of her crew.

It might be suggested that a way around this problem would be to appoint additional less experienced officers to understudy those in the ranks to which they would aspire. But the charterer, or the owner of a managed ship will make it very clear that the pay of these extra hands and the food that they eat will not be to their account. And there is no guarantee that the "experience" of the additional officer in a secondary, learning, role will be acceptable to the critical eye of the charterer. And in a highly competitive world, a manager may not be making sufficient per month to pay for additional officers. When you think about it, it is a pretty miserable industry into which we are attempting to attract bright, well-qualified people, when so many self-defeating obstacles are put in the way of somebody's ambition to progress through the ranks.

I can remember getting very angry years ago, reading about the case of a supply ship, dawdling back to its base after delivering vital supplies, like tubulars, mud or ice cream to an offshore rig. The master decided it would be a good idea to let his Mate become more familiar with the controls and in a quiet bit of sea, he gave him some tuition on manoeuvring and general ship handling. The charterer got to hear about this and went absolutely ballistic, threatening to void the agreement, accusing the skipper of barratry and effectively stealing the oil and time that he was paying for. I questioned why you would want to work for a bastard like this, and was hauled over the coals by somebody who said the charterer was quite within his rights. He was unable to answer how that Mate was ever going to get the experience he needed, but it seemed symptomatic of an industry full of rights but with little sense of responsibility. And judging by the letter in Seaways, it isn't much better today.

The job search used to be a lot simpler when I was young. I remember a miniscule "situations vacant" ad in a magazine I was reading. "Mate wanted for a 299 ton coaster" it said before going on to specify the sole qualification required - "must be sober".

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Trouble in the tank

The Maritime Advocate online
Issue 795 Jan. 15th 2022

By Michael Grey

You would be, to say the least, extremely angry, if your car came to a grinding halt and the nice person from the emergency services looked up from the engine compartment and told you the engine had been wrecked because of the fuel you had been supplied by the filling station. Your sentiments might be even more extreme if your aircraft engines suddenly emitted choking noises and stopped at 30,000 feet, because the quality of the fuel was in some way deficient.

The fact is that you are able to count on the quality of what comes out of the filling station pumps, or is supplied while the aircraft lies alongside its pier, secure in the knowledge that some quality controller, or expert chemical engineer has done their job and you don't have to worry unduly. So why is the chief engineer of a ship approaching its bunker station chewing his or her nails with concern, as they prepare to take on board hundreds, or even thousands, of tonnes of fuel into the vessel's tanks? Doesn't the quality of marine bunkers matter just as much, if you consider that the ship itself could be lost, or the engine wrecked by off-specification fuel? The fact is, the answer does not appear to be in the affirmative,

As you read this the 6662teu container ship SM Busan will be lying alongside a pier in the port of Ogden Point with the crew and machinery specialists pumping ashore her fuel into road tankers after the ship was completely disabled a short distance into her Pacific crossing from Portland to South Korea. She had lost propulsion on Christmas Eve and drifted for more than two days in a gale, before limping back to the coast, with tugs in attendance.


It was interesting to note that the latest journal of the International Salvage Union, published just before the holiday, noted a slew of large vessels disabled off the South African coast and rescued by salvage tugs. Indeed "disabled" ships requiring tug support featured quite largely in the reports from salvors around the world and it would be a fair assumption that at least some of these were suffering from "fuel problems". And there is plenty of evidence that these fuel problems are often caused by mandatory changes to or from low sulphur fuel, or something nasty such as fines or chemicals in the fuel itself.

But surely prudent owners will be employing expert fuel testing laboratories to make sure that the tiger in their tanks will not bite them? Certainly, that's the advice, but it tends to be the case that the charterer who is buying the fuel may be unwilling to pay for these analysts. The fuel the charterer has sourced is an absolute bargain and it's not his engine they will be pouring the stuff into. And maybe the owner or manager will not shell out for these services automatically, hoping that the voyage will be accomplished without problems. That's the old percentage game, that is increasingly played in our industry, where the troubles all happen to somebody else, except when they don't.

The trouble is that keeping engines running smoothly is getting much more complicated, with different grades of fuel having to be carried, and even though there may be all sorts of earnest injunctions about not using fuel that hasn't been given the green light by the laboratory, accidents do happen.

And it is going to get ever more complicated as the industry becomes involved with ever-greener fuels and fuel of very different characteristics to the simple old sludge diesels once digested. If we can't trust the bunker supplier to provide fuel that won't wreck the machinery today, will the situation be better, or worse, when many more people are buying bio-fuel, or LNG, or methanol, hydrogen or ammonia? You would like to think that bunkering such sophisticated stuff shouldn't be a matter involving such angst and the quality of ships' fuels should be beyond speculation, like fuel supplied to other industries. But you wouldn't put money on the emergence of the reliable and high quality system that other modes of transport enjoy.

We shouldn't have big ships' machinery coughing and spluttering as the pilot tries to manoeuvre it in tight port situations, as is regularly reported these days. More to the point, we really shouldn't have to depend on the ultimate insurance of powerful salvage tugs to keep disabled ships off lee shores, after their machinery has failed.

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When law clashes with practicality

Seatrade Maritime Analysis and Opinion January 2022

By Michael Grey

The wheels of justice, at least in the commercial courts, grind exceedingly slowly. Most will have forgotten the casualty to the big containership *CMA CGM Libra*, which grounded when leaving the Chinese port of Xiamen in May 2011, after its master took a short cut and unwisely departed from the buoyed fairway. The owners declared General Average, to which the cargo interests declined to contribute and the case has been rumbling on ever since, finally reaching the UK Supreme Court recently.

This confirmed the decision of both the Admiralty Court and Court of Appeal decisions that the ship was effectively unseaworthy on account of the ship's deficient passage plan and charts which failed to note the warnings about shallow depths. Thus, said the three courts, these deficiencies made the vessel unseaworthy and the owner, being at fault, was not entitled to invoke GA under York-Antwerp rules. The owner, all along had sought to suggest that the bad passage plan should not make the ship unseaworthy and the casualty was caused by errors by the crew in the navigation or management of the ship. They had, they maintained, provided the necessary equipment and a competent crew – what more could they have done?

It is an interesting case, the ultimate result causing some disquiet among ship owners and managers as it seems to call into question what exactly an owner can delegate to the crew of a ship as represented by the master. The conclusion from the Admiralty Court that a prudent owner would not have allowed the ship to leave with a defective passage plan seems to make it clear that the owner must somehow monitor detailed matters of navigational management and decisions made on board the ship. So, is this yet another case where the law seems to rule that theory clearly diverts from practice, and emphasises once again that the master's professional expertise must be minutely overseen, to stay on the right side of the law?

It also emphasises once again the importance which the courts have put upon the ship's passage plan, once lines drawn on the chart that really only meant anything outside pilotage waters, but now incorporating the dynamic situations of a berth-to-berth passage. It also begets important questions about the exact definition of what makes a passage plan "defective". And how does this really reflect on the diligence of the owner, when the master, a human being (although this might be hard to believe) makes one or even several navigational errors?

Simple seamen, like this writer, will confess to having a small percentage of the brain power available to these mighty lawyers, but surely there must be a admission that practicality should have a role in these matters. Are they really suggesting that if the owner is to be protected from the charge that the ship is unseaworthy – which is a very big deal – the owner or manager must scrutinise the passage plan and approve it, before the ship leaves the berth? You can imagine the fuss - particularly in today's pressurised climate in ports-with the master refusing to let go the lines as the necessary approval has yet to be given by some operative in the owner's office, half a hemisphere away, who happens to be asleep.

What can the wretched owner, in the light of such a case, reasonably delegate to the master or other senior officers aboard the ship, without leaving himself open to charges of a lack of due diligence? There are plenty of other operational plans or technical decisions which are taken by those aboard ship as the voyage progresses. Are we saying that the oversight of the owner must be total, if his position is to be legally protected from prejudice? In these days of amazing communications, it might just about be feasible to monitor technical data from a ship in real time. But if this case shows us anything, it is that the decisions of the courts often strain the meanings of words such as "reasonable" and "practical", as currently understood by seafarers.

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Captain Ken

Another contribution from Ken Owen which appeared in his local Mellor Church Parish magazine "Outlook" of January 2022.

As I'm very pleased to note, most of my stories and reminiscences seem to be very happy ones. However, I must confess that occasionally, some are not.

Some years ago, I was Master of a very large container ship, and one very gloomy evening, we were sailing from Hamburg bound for Bremerhaven.

It was dark, and continuous heavy drizzle made the visibility very poor indeed. Fortunately, we were assisted, as usual, by a very capable German pilot.

While we were letting go the moorings from the container berth, all the ship's fire alarms sounded.

Everyone proceeded to their allotted fire stations, but thankfully no trace of a fire was observed.

Unfortunately, the same thing happened on another two occasions, while we were still undocking.

We could only assume there must be some undetected electrical fault, and as we could hardly proceed down the river with all the alarms sounding, I requested the Chief Electrician to isolate all the alarms,

I arranged for our two deck, and two engineer trainee officers to carry out a constant fire patrol. This consisted of patrolling the ship, inside and outside, and reporting directly by vhf telephone, to the bridge and the engine control room.

The journey down the Elbe river, normally very pleasant on a bright summer's day, takes several hours, but was particularly horrible on this dark rainy night. Particularly, as instead of annoying loud fire alarms, we had no less than three separate actual fires.

The first where the curtains were ablaze in a spare empty cabin. The next in the unattended galley, where the cook's uniform was found burning in a hot stove, and the third when the tumble drier was ablaze in the crew's laundry.

Fortunately each fire was well extinguished by the crew as they had practiced on our frequent fire drills throughout the voyage.

So it was obvious, we must have a fire-bug amongst us but nobody had any idea who was the culprit.

It was essential that I should establish this, and make sure he is repatriated from the ship before we leave Bremerhaven, bound for the Far East.

I realized that these same circumstances can happen in schools, hospitals, or any place of work, but especially worrying on a ship.

A fire raiser is extremely difficult to identify.

Together with the Chief Officer, I interviewed every member of the Ship's complement, and asked where each was, when each fire broke out, and asked if they could name a witness to confirm that.

I then asked them to name, (in confidence) who they thought was responsible. The answer to this last question astounded me, as so many named someone they didn't like.

For my part, I could only eliminate those who were on the bridge with me, at the time each fire broke out.

On reaching Bremerhaven, I requested the help of the German Police. They were very helpful, and said that if it was a German flag ship, they would arrest the culprit I had identified, (one of the trainee officers) but were in agreement with my decision to arrange for him to be flown home immediately, due to extreme stress, (accompanied, for safety, by his colleague.)

It did turn out that the arsonist was a trainee officer employed by another Company, sailing with us for experience.

He certainly gave me an unwanted experience.



Ships to the rescue

The Maritime Advocate online
Issue 796 Jan. 28th 2022

By Michael Grey

The volcanic eruption that has devastated Tonga was extraordinary in that it was possible to see it, in real time, from a fortuitously positioned satellite directly above the colossal explosion. The Pacific is a very big ocean, but this looked vast, like a scaled-up recording of the nuclear blasts which gave Bikini Atoll a small place in our atomic history. Indeed, such were the apparent dimensions of the explosion as it appeared from space, that it seemed to be a minor miracle that no ships on passage were overwhelmed.

And in all the reports which came in from the damaged island, there was not even a mention of merchant ships in the vicinity, which perhaps says something of their general invisibility. Only a pollution event caused by extreme waves from the eruption involving a tanker discharging alongside in faraway Peru seemed to register with world media. Oil spills are always worth emphasising!

Perhaps there were just no ships on the route that used to take vessels bound from Panama to New Zealand ports. Maybe they just go a different way these days, or perhaps they just got a bit lucky and were routed otherwise on that particular day. It is certainly an area of sea in which the chart and sailing directions retain a certain number of “known unknowns” in the shape of reported shoals, which, when properly investigated by the hydrographers, cannot be found, which suggests that there is quite a lot of undersea activity, with mysterious things happening in the depths.

Indeed, this writer can recall a cloudless Pacific morning on passage to New Zealand, south of Tonga, when we saw a sinister brown line across the azure sea right ahead of us, where the whole sea seemed to change colour. We changed course to stay in the blue waters and then, with the echo sounder running, cautiously approached the edge of the discolouration. We dropped the sea water temperature bucket into the water, which produced a sample of cloudy liquid, faintly smelling of sulphur. This, we were told some months later by the Met. Office, was evidence of underwater volcanic activity, which at least had broken the monotony of a Pacific crossing.

The Tonga emergency also might have emphasised that when there is some unforeseen natural disaster (which happens more frequently than some people might suppose), there is nothing quite like ships to provide the aid that is needed by these stricken populations. Aircraft have limited lifting capacity and require runways that are undamaged or clear of debris to offer any help whatsoever – something that was certainly the case in Tonga, where the runways were deep in volcanic ash.

And if we look at the sort of damage that can be caused by earthquakes, tsunami and extreme weather events around the world, the sort of plant that will make the most impact in relief efforts tends to be too heavy or large to be airlifted in sufficient quantities to make a difference. Heavy lifting equipment, airlift helicopters, diggers and bulldozers, desalination plants, field hospitals, communications and worthwhile quantities of food are best provided from ships, which have ideally been designed to work with damaged port facilities.

From time to time, there have been sensible suggestions for the provision of a sort of International Marine Rescue operation, which could provide assistance in a timely manner to places sometimes wrecked by natural disasters. Various ideas have been explored for specifically designed ships which could be pre-loaded in the same way that the US have military hardware available on pre-positioned ships in various strategic places like Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean.

There have been some interesting designs made public, sometimes offering an auxiliary role as training ships for seafarers struggling to gain sea time, or a limited commercial function. A very well thought out design, for disaster relief in Caribbean waters, emerged a couple of years ago in the UK. Invariably subsequent discussions on the costs of such ships, which organisations ought to be running them and how they ought to be operated, will smother the best of intentions. And sadly, while there might be an initial enthusiasm, these designs, from wherever they emerge, never seem to be translated into steel, the concept being temporarily revived, perhaps, when the next humanitarian disaster occurs.

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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
World
Ship
Society

WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

Zoom Meeting

Of the Dorset branch of the World Ship Society

2.30pm, Saturday, February 12th 2022

~ Krispen's Travels to the Eastern Baltic ~

After our journey to the Far East in 2021 with Krispen ... in 2022 we get to see a variety of Baltic shipping

The Baltic has a varied mix of ships, of all sizes and ages. Having undertaken a four-night mini cruise around the Gulf of Finland in late 2017, Krispen replicated the trip aboard the 1986-built ferry SPL Princess Anastasia in 2018 and 2019, taking in the ports of Helsinki, St Petersburg, Tallinn, and Stockholm. We will see and hear about interesting Baltic shipping – from Russian submarines and icebreakers to cruise ships, ferries, container ships and reefers. See Birka Stockholm, the vintage steamer Stockholm, Rosmortsport icebreaker Semion Dezhnev and more.

with Krispen Atkinson

Krispen is a maritime consultant, and a director of The World Ship Society. He is a regular contributor to Ship's Monthly and Marine News, with a passion for modern merchant shipping.

Their Secretary, Steve Pink, says:

There is no need to request an invitation to our February 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.

See our 2021/22 programme via www.shipsdorset.org/events