



Gordon Thornton, who went aloft on the 13th August, went to sea in 1954 with British India on their Training ship *Chantala* which was a working cargo ship manned by cadets. He also spent some of his cadet time on the *Nevasa* which was then a troop carrier. Gordon stayed with BI on their Far East runs throughout his sea going career, sailing at one time on the *Chantala* again, this time as Chief Mate. He joined the Club in 1968 while still at sea. He left BI in 1972 to become a Southampton Pilot and was later appointed Choice Pilot for P&O. By the time of his retirement in 2001, Gordon was the last Trinity House Pilot for the Southampton & Isle of Wight District. Here is an extract from *The Pilot* magazine of October 2001, *The Final Act*.

On a sunny afternoon in April - Saturday 28th to be exact - many years of pilotage history and tradition in the Port of Southampton came to an end. Gordon Thornton boarded the P&O cruise liner *Aurora* to take her to the Nab - his final act of pilotage before retiring as the last remaining Trinity House Pilot for the Isle of Wight District.

To mark this unique occasion some forty of his colleagues, past and present, together with wives and widows, gathered on the quayside at 106 Berth to wish him well and speed him on his way. Up to the last moment Gordon was unaware of our intention, but, judging from his reaction, the surprise was a pleasant one...

To mark this special occasion, when it was known that his last act was to be the *Aurora*, plans were put together at a weeks notice to surprise Gordon and his wife Jackie.

By use of email, pilots past and present and together with Captain Ian Walters, Master of the *Aurora*, a program of events was prepared.

Gordon and his wife were lured, to both attend the sailing early, to cut the Ship's birthday cake with Captain Walters at 1610hrs, prior to a scheduled sailing at 1700hrs. All three made their way onto the dockside, where they were met by 60 people comprising of pilots past and present, and others connected with Trinity House. After a welcome address from Bill Range, a senior retired pilot, Tony Howard made a short speech..

A presentation of a framed print of *Aurora* followed, together with flowers given to Jackie by the late Mike Moore's grandson, Thomas.

The 'PENDA' Bell (from a Trinity House Pilot Vessel) was struck eight times to signify the end of Gordon's watch by a junior pilot, Barry Sadler.

Captain Walters said many fine words about pilots in general and Gordon in particular.

A green ribbon was streamed from the bridge to the dockside, which all the ladies held onto as the ship lifted off from the quay. When the ribbon was let go, Bill Range led Three Cheers from the quayside.

The harbour tug *Redbridge* gave a water display from her fire fighting cannons and led a procession of two pilot launches, *Portunus* and *Providence*, flanking the *Aurora*.

Upon passing Dockhead a Trinity House Flag was dipped as *Aurora* passed outwards.

The two pilot launches escorted *Aurora* out to the Forts. In the Solent two retired Trinity House Pilots saluted Gordon from aboard their sailing yacht. By this time Gordon was more than quite emotional.

More was to come, as Captain Ian Walters and his bridge team first presented a signed copy of a book detailing the building of the *Aurora*. The Captain then presented a plaque of the ship and at the Nab Tower personally escorted Gordon to the pilot ladder for a final photo. The crew and passengers gave Three Cheers as Gordon descended the ladder to board the pilot launch.

Quite a day!



Gordon's wife Jackie pre-deceased him and our condolences go to his step-daughter Debbie and her husband Ted.