

# The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

**No 108**

**September 2024**

## Captain's Log

**A** very well welcome from your Captain to this edition of The Cachalot and a few words from the Captain's Log.

I do hope all are enjoying the Summer. I will take this opportunity to share with you a development in the wider maritime of interest that both myself and your Staff Captain Nick Jeffrey have been working on.

Industry is now standing up maritime apprenticeships to access the Government Training Levy pot for 100% course funding to Master Mariner Certificate of Competencies. This training levy pot is currently £2Bn underspent, allegedly as national take up of apprenticeships has been poor. As part of the Government drive to increase skills in the offshore renewable sector we have targeted 500GT CoCs first. Your truly is the Chair of the Master500GT Apprenticeship Trailblazer.

A Trailblazer is an employer lead working group aimed at delivering the standard and following the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) guidelines to access the funding. We have secured a maritime funding record recommendation from IfATE for the maximum funding banding of £27,000 per apprentice. This also includes pathfinding funding to embrace the emerging MCA Bridge Watchkeeping Skills Simulator Course.

Ten days of simulator training to world standard here in the UK will secure thirty days remission of sea service and aid more consistent training outputs. A real precedent for maritime keenly watched by other sectors.

Like it or not more autonomy is coming and next generations will be "at sea" without being at sea. Simulator training is the future. Final agreement on funding is now with the Department for Education.

So what next.... September onwards we will be standing up two new trailblazers. OOW3000GT for larger coastal towage and embracing our key superyacht CoC market.... This will in time move to Master3000GT and embrace funding for all CoC pathways up to the more familiar Unlimited CoCs. These Unlimited CoCs are funded by the Department for Transport in what is known as SMarT funding for Unlimited cadetships already.

For me a particularly exciting stand up is a Master200GT Trailblazer. This represents an ideal "bottom up" stepping stone pathway up the CoC ladder. It will mean an MCA Master Mariner CoC is obtainable from cold start in only twelve months. It will add a professional ladder from the previous unique RYA Offshore Yachmaster route and broaden recognised navigation training elements to grow a CoC numbers at this starter level.

The MCA is already working on "stepping stone" pathways to 500GT CoCs and then onwards 3000GT and towards Unlimited. For someone holding a Master Mariner 200GT CoC the seetime requirement for OOW500GT will be halved. Stepping stone up the CoC ladder with one CoC feeding the next. Quite a change from the old Home Trade, Middle Trade and Unlimited routes siloed beforehand.

In my Royal Navy role the Royal Navy will be embracing these CoC pathways. Indeed the Army and Royal Marines for Master200GT also. The end game being growing our pyramid effect UK CoC model from the bottom up.

There is no reason why the next generation of seafarer could not start on small craft and move steadily upwards CoC wise to command the largest ships in the world. In my RN world it beggars belief the Captain of a Royal Navy aircraft carrier cannot command the Gosport Ferry. That is to change as MOD tax payer funded training for RN embraces DfE funding to bridge the CoC gap.

The Royal Navy in effect trains 144 warfare officers per year.... This will aspire to add that number of CoC qualified cadets to the current UK MN numbers struggling to grow beyond 550 per year.... Those numbers have tumbled from pre-Covid ~850 and we are determined to deliver UK maritime growth again. So we may look optimistically on growth again we hope.

Enjoy this super Summer.

Lt Cdr David Carter MNM

Club Captain

## Boatsteerer's Locker

**Meeting's at RBL** - Our meetings at the RBL Club room on a Friday continue to attract the usual suspects with some additional faces now and again. As per the Cachalite issued 2nd August, we now have a new person to attend the upstairs bar. Karen has previously worked in the RBL bar downstairs so knows the system. Currently, two of the draught pumps are in operation having been well cleaned with the RBL often using the upper bar in lieu of downstairs when third party events are in place. The fridge is stocked with bottled beers, along with zero or low alcohol beers, soft drink mixers and wines. Please note this is a cash bar only.



Cheers!

**Zoom gatherings** - Generally available on a Wednesday from 1030. I will contact the usual attendees to confirm at the beginning of each week. Please contact me if you wish to join us and I will send the log in details.

**250 Club** - Remember, you have to be in it to win it!!! Captain Kelso has been doing very well this year and we wish him continued good fortune.

**DP World Charity Golf Day** - I was pleased to be invited to play again in the annual charity day in aid of Saints Foundation at Bramshaw Golf Club in late July. Forty-four players from clients and customers and associates of DP World for an individual Stableford and team Stableford competition. Yours truly had the same score as the winner of the individual round but came 5th after countback of the scores.

The DP World Charity Golf Day raised **£1440** for Saints Foundation.

**Functions** - Mark Oakley is your point of contact as Functions Officer, and he will be delighted to receive any suggestions and ideas for events and locations through the coming year. [functions@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:functions@cachalots.org.uk)

A programme of events is posted on the noticeboard in the Club room and is available on the Cachalots

website at [Programme of Events 2024 – 2025 | The Cachalots](#)

Two curry lunches have been held at Everest Cuisine in May and July with about 25 members and guests attending. It was a pleasant surprise to find a newly installed chair-lift fitted to the stairway which Past Captain Lionel Hall took full advantage of.



The next curry lunch will be **28<sup>th</sup> September**.

**Trafalgar Dinner – The Grand, Southampton – 18<sup>th</sup> October** - Arrangements are in place for our now annual hosting of the Trafalgar Dinner with members of the local maritime community joining us for an evening of celebration and reflection of the Battle of Trafalgar and Horatio Nelson. Our guest speaker is Rear Admiral Iain Lower, Deputy Master of Trinity House who will provide the Immortal Memory. There will be a prize draw with money raised for the Southampton Sea Cadets. Tickets are available now through the Cachalot's office at **£69** per person with tables of ten available although we can assign smaller groups and individuals.

**Harpooners Dinner – 6<sup>th</sup> November**

Generally, for all former harpooners and officers of the Club, this dinner will be held at the RBL main room. I will make be making contact with former harpooners.

**Christmas Lunch – RBL - Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December**

We have been liaising with Chef Sam to provide our Christmas Lunch once again. Terry will issue a Cachalite in good time to receive names.

And finally, the last opening of the Club room at the RBL before Christmas will be Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December and will re-open 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2025!!!!

Enjoy your autumn.

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE

Boatsteerer

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

## Shipping Festival Service – Thursday 13th June 2024



Parade of flags before the service in a dry interlude.

With the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of D-Day and civic celebrations being held the previous week, our annual service was deferred by a week.

Approximately 112 people attended the service including distinguished guests, the High Sheriff of Hampshire, Mr Jon Whitaker, the Lord Mayor of Southampton, Cllr David Shields and the Sheriff of Southampton, Cllr James Bailie. We were also pleased to welcome the interim Commanding Officer Portsmouth Naval Base, Captain Lee McLocklan as well as various representatives from maritime businesses and entities around the port of Southampton.

The Southampton Sea Cadets provided hands to carry the White and Blue Ensigns and shipping flags with three cadets in training from Warsash Maritime School carrying the Red Ensign.

Musical accompaniment was provided by the Southampton (Albion) Band under the guidance of Musical Director, Nick Dawson.

The service was led by the recently appointed Bishop of Winchester, Philip Mounstephen with the Reverend Canon David Miller of St. Michael's Church assisted by Fr. James Mosher (Mission to Seafarers), Fran Sahetapy (Sailors' Society) and Cachalot Peter Giles representing Stella Maris. A small reception was held in the Stella Maris Hall afterwards.

The post service collection was divided between St. Michael's Church and the three maritime charities, Mission to Seafarers, Stella Maris and the Sailor's Society.

Our thanks to the churchwarden and members of St. Michael's and the Catholic Churches of Southampton for allowing us the use of the church and the Stella Maris hall nearby.



## From the editor

### Web site woes

We have recently experienced some problems on our website in that we suddenly lost access to all the sub-pages. These problems are sometimes caused when updates to certain parts of the site conflict with other parts and although our site hosts could not identify the specific bug they did manage to restore the site to a previously backed up version.

I am certainly no expert in such stuff but here is how I see it:

The site works on a platform called WordPress which is an open source facility for hosting all manner of websites and blogs. Each website/blog chooses a *Theme* which governs the appearance and uniformity of the pages. When our current site was set up in 2011 we chose a theme called *Evolve* which was then new on the scene. Since then WordPress has released seven new themes, now an almost annual occurrence it seems, the latest one being called *Twenty Twenty-Four*. To our theme were added 22 *Plugins* which are programmes or apps that help us edit the content of the site to our specific requirements. We have since reduced them to 15, discarding those that we didn't use.

There are currently in excess of **70,000** such plugins available, contributed by developers and enthusiasts world-wide, but not all are updated and workable,. They range from free to freemium and premium. Some of the free ones solicit donations, much like Wikipedia and Mozilla Thunderbird and Firefox.

WordPress, Evolve and our Plugins are all updated regularly and the system notifies us when the updates need to be installed.

I suspect that the developers of the plugins would naturally aim their amendments and updates at the latest versions of the themes and our Evolve may not have evolved fast enough to keep up. After all, 14 years in the computer world is a tremendous time and I bet that many of the current developers and computer nerds were hardly out of nappies then.

(We recently took my wife's recalcitrant tablet to the help desk at Curry's and the young techno-wizard was reluctant to look at it because it was, at just less than 4 years old, deemed to be out of date!)

So, perhaps the time has come for us to bite the bullet and, like my wife, throw money at the problem and buy new.

In fact, prior to this latest attack of the gremlins, steps had already been taken to look into and overhaul our website and IT system, a sub-group formed, meetings held and a budget set.

The aim is to install a more modern inter-active system, rather than the current one-way information only one, so that most, if not all, of the Club's day to day business can be conducted online. That includes bookings and payments for functions, subs etc. and it is hoped that it will appeal to the the younger computer savvy generations. It will still need a, preferably younger, webmaster however and if you have managed to follow my laborious explanations above then you might just prove to be that person.

My previous pleas for more input from you have obviously fallen on stony ground so I am going to try a little experiment. If you have bothered to read this so far and send the code PYMWYMI to my [editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk) address, before the end of September, I will donate £1 to the Captain's charity, the Maritime Volunteer Service. If you correctly decipher the code I will add another pound.

Terry Clark, Editor and Webmaster

## New Members

**Valerie Contreras** is a Human Resource Manager with Royal Caribbean's Azamara Cruises with the appropriate professional qualifications.

She is also the voluntary Chief Purser on the s.s. 'Shieldhall' and was recommended by a fellow volunteer member. She is very interested in supporting other mariners.

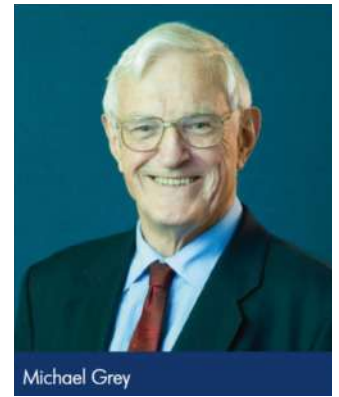
**Nicholas Gaden** is semi-retired from the Transport and Logistics sector where he worked as a ship's agent for OCL, P&O Containers and Maersk Line. During that time he worked with and became friends with both Ian Thomson and Richard James.

He enjoys cruising, walking and football.

# Inconvenient convenience

**The Maritime Advocate online Issue 862 August 9th 2024**

By *Michael Grey MBE*



**I**t was years ago that an old friend, who was a shipbroker, told me proudly that using his new mobile telephone, then something the size of a house-brick, he had fixed a cargo for one of his clients from the vegetable aisle of his local supermarket, while his embarrassed wife, pretending that he was no possible relation to her, seethed among the frozen foods. He was just so delighted with this remarkable new aid to productivity, that he rang me up on my landline to tell me about it. Sadly, his pleasure was not to last. Within months, he would be woken up before dawn as his clients in Hong Kong enthusiastically sought his opinion on some likely cargo and eighteen hours later, as he was preparing for bed, there would be an urgent demand for action from San Francisco. The age of constant and global availability, with this one hard-worked soul, effectively and in real time, doing the job of three people, had brutally arrived. His life, previously governed by the hours worked by the bad-tempered office telex operator and the need to give three days' notice to book an international call from Piraeus, had changed, utterly. Fortunately, he retired a long time ago, so the new threats of Artificial Intelligence will hopefully pass him by as they afflict Generation Z.

Whether the stresses and strains of modern and instant communication will be mitigated by the suggestions that the new UK Labour government could enact a sort of "switch-off" law to give employees a bit of remission from being always on-call, remains to be seen. I would doubt that it has much chance of success, especially in any international business, where somebody refusing to pick up a phone will be regarded unfavourably. It might be both sensible and acceptable for airline pilots or long-distance lorry drivers to officially "clockoff," but most of us cannot cite health and safety rules, although mental pressures seem to be looked upon with rather more sympathy these days. Mind you, the whole argument for privacy has been rendered awry by the Working From Home culture and the availability of "mouse-movers", which give the impression of diligent activity, when there is none. But just maybe, with the concerns about "resilience" in a digital age, rearing their exceedingly ugly head with the global outage of pretty well everything during the "CloudStrike" emergency last month, the practices of the past may prove not to be completely outdated. Maybe we need alternatives to having all our data in cyberspace, where random IT nerds or malicious state hackers cannot cause such mayhem.

We perhaps should not be taking Russia as an example of forward-thinking, but I was reading that old-fashioned typewriters and paper, have been enjoying a comeback as a result of fears about electronic security in that paranoid society. I still have my old portable in the attic, although quite who might manufacture ribbons may be a problem. And even Telex machines, I am told, are being disinterred from store cupboards, or even antique shops, although you might need special training to work them. It is good to be given a sharp shock about our vulnerability in

## **The downside of digital convenience and efficiency is fragility.**

this digital, interconnected world, where those who believe in instantly accessible data and a cashless society were seriously embarrassed by the temporary shutdown of so much that we have learned to depend upon. All this, we were given to believe, was as a result of some technical error, but goodness knows what a really determined enemy might do to our digital dependence. You may guarantee that they are practising hard against that need, and will have been tremendously comforted by this untoward "dress rehearsal." And in ships at sea, you have to hope that they are checking up on what the screens are telling them, by using the old tried and tested.

"Lead, log and look-out" will get you home, even though it might be rather tedious. There is some useful advice in this week's Spectator, where advertising man Rory Sutherland advocates a sort of Luddism as a defence against technological vulnerability. "Carry cash. Book your flights from a human. Shop locally. Write cheques. The downside of digital convenience and efficiency is fragility." Wise words. You do not need much imagination to transpose this to its maritime equivalence.

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**The Maritime Advocate online**  
www.avoarchive.com

*and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey MBE [greyjm@gmail.com](mailto:greyjm@gmail.com)*



*This article was contributed by Past Captain Ian Thomson, a Blue Funnel man, and comes from the Blue Funnel Association newsletter supplement, Vol.II No 22, where it was reprinted from Sea Breezes but I know not when. It was written by Captain Pilling, another Blue Funnel man who was a contributor to Sea Breezes.*

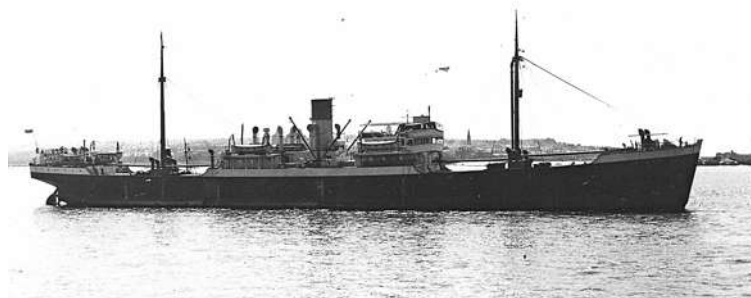
## THE SINKING OF THE BLUE FUNNEL LINER MEDON

By Capt John F. Pilling

All things considered, young Harry Howarth felt himself a lucky lad. Hailing from Blackpool, where his family ran a successful confectionery business, he was just 25, and serving as 2nd radio officer aboard the Blue Funnel cargo liner *MEDON*. They were currently on passage from Capetown, to Trinidad, and were just of the West African Coast,

Harry had attended the Northern Counties College at Preston, Lancashire, and whilst originally he thought he would never attain the required speed in morse to achieve the passing out standard, familiarity brought ease in making sense of the jumbled dots and dashes in common with his fellow students, and in due course he was awarded his PMG certificate, leaving him free to pick a company, Not a difficult situation, for the way ships were being sunk, qualified radio officers were very much in demand.

Blue Funnel, or the "China boats" as they were known on Merseyside, were a company he always had his sights set on. With Brocklebanks a close second, he could hardly believe his good fortune when Alfred Holt and Co favoured his application, He was in good health, but more to the point he was alive, in sharp contrast to four of the lads who'd been with him at the Preston College, and who's ships had been sunk, Yes, as stated at the beginning, young Harry considered himself a very lucky man. However, This luck ended abruptly at 0300 on August 10th 1942, when *MEDON* was torpedoed, and the crew took to the boats, thus beginning what was to be but the start of what became an epic and harrowing adventure,



*Medon, 5,444 grt, 406.5 ft loa, built in 1923*

Whether it was the accepted fact that the standards to which Alfred Holt had their ships built, (which was a degree higher than Lloyds specifications,) to be rated "A1 at Lloyds" than which there was generally rated to be no higher specification, is debatable. What was not, was the fact that she didn't sink, So, to augment what stores they had in the lifeboats, and collect some navigational instruments to assist in whatever befell them in the immediate future, a few of the crew, led by 2nd mate Freddie Fuller reboarded *MEDON*. Unfortunately for the crew, the submarine commander was also aware that *MEDON* was still afloat, so he surfaced and began to shell her, finally putting her down with a second torpedo, The submarine was Italian, the *REGINALDO GIULIANI*.

Left on their own, the lifeboats rafted together and the decision was then taken to make for British Guyana, trying to keep as close together as possible, whilst on passage. This was obviously going to be more a matter of wishful thinking than any form of practical proposition, however hard they might try.

They checked for casualties, but found that apart from one man with a broken leg, they were minor. Within four days, the boats had lost sight of each other. No 4 boat was picked up on the 7th day, by the Norwegian ship *TAMERLANE*, and No 1 boat was rescued the next day by the Panamanian vessel *ROSEMOUNT*. No 2 boat had to wait considerably longer, 35 days in all, before the Portuguese *LUSO* took in her pathetic crowd, who were beginning to wonder where all the worlds shipping had disappeared to.

Harry was in No 3 boat, and consequently, was still adrift at sea, but they were making reasonable progress. Water was becoming something of a problem, and strict rationing was in force. But, what was worrying young Harry and one or two of the others, were the sharks. Several large ones, had been following the boat for days, anticipating a meal, The sight of these powerful predators so upset two of the young seamen, that the officer in charge, Mr Fuller, who had a gun, shot the largest of them. The youngsters fears were eased somewhat, by the sight of the other sharks rushing in to devour their former companion. Still, a rather frightening sight.

In addition to the water problem, sunburn was bothering them all, but there was little that could be done to this end. Morale quickly became a problem, as day by day went by without sight of a ship. As the days lengthened, one week, then two, their spirits become even lower, Mr Fuller, realising the gravity of the situation, set about doing something positive, His ideas for restoring morale were good and did much to alleviate what could have become a very real problem,

He made each of the Europeans in turn, tell the story of his life, his education, his aims in life, and his hopes. He then went on to get them to list the various ships in which they had sailed, This subject proved a winner, for many of them recognised the ships involved, which led to questions of old and barely remembered shipmates. When they were last seen and runs ashore were discussed. Someone thought up a quiz, and others had to relate their most embarrassing moment.

Rowing had been abandoned after the first two days, as the second mate said there was no point in it, When there was insufficient wind, the standing lug and jib were used as awnings, as protection against the sun. By now, they were well into the third week, and apathy was beginning to set in,

Track of time was kept by notches cut into the boats gunnel'. Into the fifth week now, On the 36th day, a little after 0900, one of the lookouts cried out, "A ship...A ship" Sure enough, there was a ship, plainly visible, and, more to the point, steaming toward them.

A rusty old tramp with but a single funnel. As she drew closer, one of the ABs claimed he knew her, "Ropners" he said. Of all the ships to be rescued by, one of Sir William Ropners. The *REEDPOOL*. Well, hungry or not, she was greeted as the saviour she undoubtedly was, and within half an hour, *MEDON*'s men had been welcomed aboard, greeted effusively, and were being well looked after with cold beers that some of them had dreamed about.

Their relief was short lived however, for on September 20th, *REEDPOOL* was herself torpedoed by a large German submarine U515, which surfaced later and shelled them for good measure, destroying all but one of the lifeboats. "New policy they have" declared one of *REEDPOOL*'s crew, as they watched her sink, A distressing fact which was becoming all too familiar as more and more of Britain's civilian sailors watched their ships sink about them.

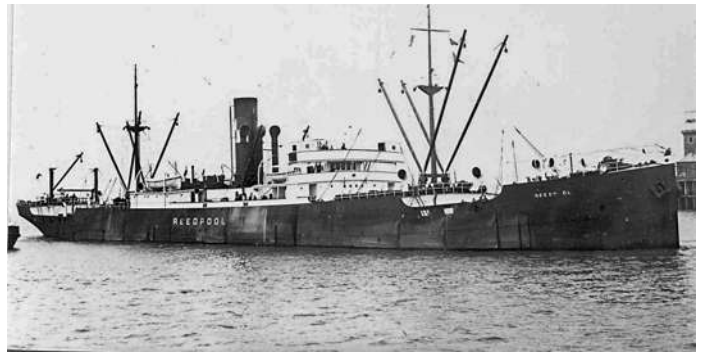
So, both rescuers, and rescued, set off once again in their heavily overcrowded lifeboat containing *REEDPOOL*'s 34, and *MEDON*'s remaining 16, Fortunately, this time their open boat voyage was to be much shorter. They were rescued the next day by, of all things, a sailing schooner, the *MILLIE M MASHER*, a British flag vessel, Master F.S.Barnes, and a four man crew, bound from Barbados to Georgetown where the weary survivors were duly landed and eventually returned to the UK,

Everyone who started in No 3 boat, finished safely. *MEDON*'s 36 days in an open boat was one of the longest periods suffered by any merchant seamen during the entire war.

Few of the officers served actively at sea again, one exception being Eddie Paynter, who achieved master, and with whom I sailed many years later. Harry, when asked if he could perform at his job as well as he could before *MEDON*, answered truthfully that he couldn't, and was put to administrative duties in India Building's steamship department.

Mr Fuller became officer in charge at Blue Funnel's Outward Bound Sea School at Aberdovey. *MEDON*'s Captain Evans was not taken prisoner after the sinking, and was awarded the OBE on his return to Britain. Captain Downs of the *REEDPOOL* however, WAS taken prisoner after the sinking. A remarkable tale indeed, and fortunately, one with happy results.

*All of the crew of the Medon survived but six from the Reedpool were lost when she was attacked and sunk.*



*Ropner's Reedpool, 4838 grt, built in 1924*

## **Cachalots**

### ***A message about subscription increases.***

Thank you for being a member of The Cachalots and for supporting the Club.

We hope this message finds you well.

Following a historical assessment of subscription levels and income received, a motion, with supporting evidence was put forward at the committee meeting in March to increase the membership fee for each category.

This motion was discussed at the management meeting in June and members present agreed to take the recommendation forward.

We fully understand that nobody likes to see price increases, but there has not been an increase in fees since 2013 and this change will help us provide the best service to our valued members.

The membership fee will increase by £5 with effect from the renewal date of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025.

The new subscription fees will be as follows:

Full member £50

Retired member £40

Overseas member £15

The change will be published firstly in the September edition of *The Cachalot* and again in the December edition together with the renewal notice, and by email to Cachalots who prefer electronic communication. For those who pay by Standing Order, you will be requested to amend or change any order you currently have with your bank in good time.

If you would like to know more about these changes, or have any concerns about the subscription fee increase, please visit the Cachalot website or contact the Club. Cachalot Nick Jeffery has agreed to be the point of contact and can currently be contacted through [staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:staffcaptain@cachalots.org.uk)

On behalf of the Membership Committee, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to the Cachalots.

Best regards,

Robin Plumley MBE

Boatsteerer

## SHIELDHALL EVENT 5

A joint initiative between The Cachalots, The Southampton Wardroom  
and the Solent Branch of the Nautical Institute.

You are invited to join us to make new friends, swing the  
lantern, network and meet like-minded mariners at

### A SOCIAL EVENING FOR PROFESSIONAL MARINERS AND PARTNERS

Friday September 6th from 18.00 on board SS Shieldhall,  
alongside at 49 Berth Southampton SO14 3QN

**PLEASE NOTE THIS BERTH IS IN THE EASTERN DOCKS,  
NOT WHERE SHIELDHALL IS REGULARLY BERTHED**

There is an optional BBQ (please pre-book),  
priced at £15 - pay on the night

£3 of this covers our Shieldhall costs. If you are not eating, please  
consider donating £3 or more on the night.

Dress code: Informal/relaxed

To let us know you are coming and/or to book food, please visit:

[www.tickettailor.com/events/nauticalinstitutesolentbranch/1352700](http://www.tickettailor.com/events/nauticalinstitutesolentbranch/1352700)

<b>250 Club</b>		
May	L R Morris	F Pedersen
June	S Daniels	R Sinclair
July	C R Kelso	C R Kelso

## Curry Lunches



EVEREST CUISINE



Now our preferred Curry House, it suits our palates and our pockets as well as our numbers.  
The stairs may be daunting for some (no lift) but they are in three flights so you can always  
rest at Base Camp or Camp I during your ascent.

**And they have recently installed a stair lift for those with mobility problems**

It's on the corner of Queensway and Briton Street (Some will remember it as POSH)

The next Curry Lunch is booked there for

**Saturday 28th September**  
1230 for 1300

The price will be £24 per person, exclusive of gratuity.

The last booking for this year is on

16th November

Nearest car park is Gloucester Square, off the High Street, and there may be  
on-street parking available in Queensway.

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





# Admiral of the Port's Trafalgar Dinner

At The Grand  
South Western House  
Southampton SO14 3AS

Friday 18th October 2024

1900 for 1930

Black Tie

Tickets **£69** each

Available only from

Southampton Master Mariners' Club

First Floor, Southampton Royal

British Legion Club,

Eastgate Street, Southampton.

SO14 3HB (sae please)

Tel: 023 8022 6155

( Friday 1130 - 1430)

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

Full details on our website:

[www.cachalots.org.uk](http://www.cachalots.org.uk)

**In Aid of the  
Southampton  
Sea Cadets**

The editor will be retreating to Kerala for most of November  
so the cut-off date for the next edition (#109) will be earlier than usual,  
on Friday 25th October '24



## Zoom Meetings

The meetings will resume on 14th September

after the summer break.

They will welcome Captain Robin Plumley MBE

“At Sea with the British Antarctic Survey”

Their Secretary, Steve Pink, says:

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

## The CACHALOTS

The Southampton Master Mariners' Club

1st Floor, Southampton Royal British

Legion Club, Eastgate Street

SOUTHAMPTON, SO14 3HB

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[editor@cachalots.org.uk](mailto:editor@cachalots.org.uk)

The Club room is currently open on just one day of the week, Friday, 1130 - 1500. 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.

## Medals for Nuclear Veteran At Last!

**A** Cachalot who was part of Britain's nuclear weapons testing programme in the 1950s and 1960s has been presented with the Nuclear Tests Medal honouring his service. Past Captain (1997) Terry Hughes is among the 2,000 survivors of the 20,000 men who were part of the tests in Christmas Island. The medal was presented at the Lydney Branch (Gloucestershire) of the Royal British Legion by Wing Cdr John Coles. (Right)

Terry wrote an article which appeared in *The Cachalot*, edition 85 of February 2021, in which he described his experiences when he was aboard the supply ship *RFA Wave Ruler* when the first and largest Hydrogen Bomb was detonated at Christmas Island in the Pacific Ocean in 1958.



Captain Terry Hughes, Dennis Hayden (ex RAF and fellow LabRat) and Wing Cdr John Coles

Terry is a Member of the International Organisation LabRats - Legacy of the Bomb Recognising Atomic Test Survivors - who are campaigning for recognition and compensation for those involved in the tests which caused a variety of serious health issues, not only to the veterans who participated in the tests but also to many of their descendants as well.

Wing Cdr Coles told the veterans, 'It is an honour on behalf of His Majesty, the Government and the Nation to thank you for your unique service. You can wear this medal with pride.'



The RFA had a number of ships passing through Christmas Island during the various tests, in support of the Royal Navy, as well as other Armed Forces. Terry was sent there in 1958 at the tender age of 19 as part of an exercise to monitor the H-Bomb. No protective clothing was provided and the ship's company were told by the Resident Naval Officer that everything would be all right. The RNO provided the Officers with Dosimeters, which were taken away immediately after the test. No results were ever forthcoming.

Terry, a junior navigating officer at the time, was below deck monitoring the crew when the bomb exploded some twelve or so miles away from his ship. "I remember seeing the flash through the engine room skylights, feeling the strong wind from it and hearing the noise of the bang itself, which was very loud. After the explosion we were allowed on deck to view the aftermath - a huge mushroom type cloud soaring to a great height in the sky. Quite terrifying really". Ironically, after Christmas Island the *Wave Ruler* was deployed to Iceland, taking part in the first 'cod war'. Perhaps it was to cool off!

Terry took part with other Nuclear Veterans in Last Years' London Cenotaph Parade. This was the first time the veterans were able to proudly display their Nuclear Test Medals. (Here is a link to the BBC coverage including an interview with Terry: <https://www.labrats.international/remembrance>)

The medal itself features an atom surrounded by olive branches and bears the words "Nuclear Test Medal". The obverse bears an effigy of His Majesty the King. The ribbon design includes blue for the sky and ocean, representative of the Pacific, red for the Australian desert, black and yellow for the radiation and white for the flash.



In May this year Terry and three other Nuclear Veterans were invited to a Buckingham Palace garden party for veterans by the Not Forgotten Association. There, the four were all presented to Vice Admiral Sir Timothy Laurence. The afternoon tea was excellent!



Captain Terry Hughes and his Wife Karen at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party.



Terry was one of four Nuclear Veterans present on the day.



Being presented to Vice Admiral Sir Timothy Laurence

## Going Under – the fifth part

*Continuing the travels of Cachalot Colin Crimp and Jill Fitzpatrick (read the previous parts in Cachalots 102, 103 & 106, 107).*

New Zealand South Island (north)

**T**he Possum is not supposed to be in New Zealand. They were introduced from Australia by European settlers in the 19th century as a source of food and fur and have thrived in New Zealand ever since. However, since the late 20th century, they have been viewed as invasive pests, at odds with much of the native flora and fauna of the country (kiwis included) and great effort is being made to decimate their numbers by trapping and with poison, with a view to getting rid of them altogether. But, it has to be said, their fur is amazing – similar in some ways to polar bear fur – and there exists today a thriving industry in mixing possum fibre with merino wool to produce the softest and warmest gloves and knitwear imaginable. But what will happen when the last Possum has gone?



*West Coast of South Island*



*Seal colony at Tauranga Bay*

The journey north from **Hokitika** up the west coast of South Island revealed different scenery. The rugged rocky coastline was on one side of the road, the mountains rose up into cloud on the other, and the whole lot was covered in a sea of green – trees and vegetation which looked like tropical jungle mixed with woodland and just about everything else in between. It stretched from the rocky shore to our left, where the sun shone brightly, right into the mountains on our right, where it was raining hard. After a vigorous cliff walk to look at the seal colony in Tauranga Bay, we headed for the wonderfully named Cape Foulwind, to see if it really was that bad. In contrast to the dreadful weather that James Cook encountered in 1770, we found the place hot, sunny and calm, with a beautiful lighthouse stuck on the end.

On its way from **Murchison** down to **Westport** (near Cape Foulwind), the Buller River passes through Buller Gorge. The road follows the river and we headed upstream on a very twisting and narrow road that sometimes crossed over the worst bits on little single-track bridges, and sometimes was part of the original mountain trail cut straight into the cliff face and only just wide enough for a horse and cart. After the first 20 miles of this, imagine our joy and surprise at coming across an oasis, an isolated roadhouse called ‘Berlins’ with excellent coffee and cakes. That had been Lower Buller Gorge. There was still Upper Buller Gorge to do, but not until we’d passed across the plateau, lush and green with cattle grazing wherever you looked. Upper Buller Gorge was just as exciting as its Lower counterpart, and led us to The Buller Gorge Swing Bridge. Not a swing bridge as we’d know it, but a rope suspension bridge over the rapids below. It originated to allow miners to walk



*Cape Foulwind – on a better day*



*Buller Gorge Swing Bridge*

across the gorge to pan for gold in White Creek. It had a deck to walk on, about a foot wide, and was 120 metres long. Jill hates that sort of thing so she went first and I followed. It did move about quite a lot, especially as one had to squeeze past people coming the other way, and there was some relief at reaching the other side. After a good walk around the mine workings, we were faced with 2 options for our return across the gorge – either walk back across the rope bridge or take the nearby zip-wire. There was no contest, it had to be the rope bridge, of course. Obviously.

In **Murchison**, we awoke in our campground beside the Buller River to glorious sunshine and set off north towards **Nelson** on another narrow, twisting road through tree-covered mountains. The trees soon gave way to broom coming into flower, making the whole mountain range look as if it had been painted bright yellow. We reached the high valleys at **Kohatu** and The Flat Rock café, where we drank coffee and ate spectacular cheese scones in the company of around 50 bikers, the car park filled to capacity with Triumphs and Harley-Davidsons. As they all left, the quiet of the mountains was shattered, but the noise soon faded and peace reigned once more over the lush high valleys and their hops, grapevines, raspberries and, incredibly, huge fields of peonies in bloom – cut flowers and tubers which go around the world.

Down in **Nelson**, on the north coast, where the sound of birdsong was as constant as it had been everywhere else in New Zealand, we were asked if we had been to see Abel Tasman National Park and if not, then we really should. Needing no further persuasion, we booked a cruise up the coastal boundary of the park. This also included a beach drop-off, a 5-mile walk and a pick-up from another beach. We boarded the ferry from the sands of **Kaiteriteri** beach the next morning in hot sunshine but with a chilly sea-breeze, and cruised up the coast for a couple of hours as far as **Totaranui**, stopping to look at seal colonies, little blue penguins, golden sandy bays, and rocky islands. The Abel Tasman Park has virtually no road access and so the only way to get to many of the trails, lodges and settlements is by boat. On the way back, we were dropped off on the beach at **Apple Tree Bay** for the 3-hour walk to **Anchorage**. The path led steeply up into damp forest along the cliff-top, quite hard going and getting narrow with tree roots and rather close to the edge in places. Every now and then there was a break in the tree canopy giving fabulous views of the turquoise blue of Tasman Bay and its islands and beaches. The final descent to the sands of **Anchorage Bay** was steep (and not comfortable on the knees!) and we flopped down on the beach in the shade of a tree to await the return of our boat. What a day.

The return to **Nelson** took us through **Mapua**, at one time a port for the export of apples but now a rather twee arty centre, to the fertile land around **Richmond**, where the vegetables, orchards, hop fields and vineyards stretched on and on.



*Beautiful Abel Tasman National Park*



*Logging – 24/7*

Our goal was to get to **Picton** and a ferry for **Wellington**, North Island, but that was 60 miles away. The road to get there turned out to have the steepest ups and downs with the twistiest hillside bends so far. The final part of this route was along the coast and was called ‘Queen Charlotte’s Drive’. It sounded gentle enough. Not a bit of it. Rocky hairpin bends, steep slopes and constant road works (repairing chunks of tarmac that had washed away and fallen into the sea) made for very slow (but very exciting) progress. Close to **Picton**, we came to a huge timber yard and wharf, with timber carrier being loaded, and saw the reality of the 24/7 logging and timber industry which upsets a lot of people, Maori included. When we finally dropped down into the town and checked into a campground near the centre, **Picton** was fast taking on the appearance of a truck stop. There were huge trucks parked in every available bit of road. Maybe this should have told us something. We had naively assumed that, with up to 6 sailings a day, we could just turn up, wait a few hours and drive on board. Due to the coming together of several unconnected circumstances, this was not going to be the case.

There are two operators of these ferries, Interislander and Bluebridge. Both of these invited us to join their standby lists as there were no bookings available for at least 5 days. It became evident that, because of various ongoing damage repairs (Cook Strait can be very turbulent) and scheduled dry-dockings, 3 ships were out of action, leaving each operator with only one available ship. No wonder there were so many trucks waiting. There was nothing for it but to camp out in Bluebridge’s terminal building and await events. Day 1 – the standby list was already closed when we got there. Day 2 – there was no standby list as all sailings were running late. Day 3 – we got on the standby list, but when our turn came Big Bertha was too big to fit in the space. Someone must have taken pity on us then because, when a cancellation came in, they gave us a definite booking for the sailing that night. What relief.

During our enforced stay in **Picton** we found that it has an interesting whaling museum down on the waterfront and some great cafes and restaurants – at one of which Jill tried out the famous ‘green lipped mussels’. They sound quite disgusting (not a good marketing name) but apparently tasted really good. At last, the time came to board and we sailed out of **Picton** just as darkness fell. In daylight, this would be such a beautiful part of the passage but, sadly, we were not able to see much of the islands as we worked our way in between them and out into Cook Strait, heading for **Wellington**.



*Leaving Picton at dusk*



## Captain Ken

*Here is another contribution from Ken Owen that appeared in his local Mellor Church Parish magazine "Outlook" back in May 2023 and which for some reason I had overlooked., even though it has a local connection.*

*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/>*

**D**uring my earlier years at sea, in the Blue Funnel Line, we regularly called at Glasgow loading and discharging cargo, to and from the Far East.

This of course required the most attractive route of the Firth of Clyde, passing the Isle of Arran. And I remember occasionally passing a steam passenger vessel filled with seemingly happy passengers cheerfully waving to us, The ship was the 'Shieldhall' and it was some years before I discovered she was actually a sewage ship carrying sewage from Glasgow city, to dump in the sea just past Ailsa Craig Island, outside the Firth. Most of the passengers didn't know this was her purpose, as she was such a lovely ship, carefully designed as a passenger ship.



Many years later, I was surprised to see her in Southampton, as she had been purchased by Southern Water, and it wasn't long before she was declared an Historic Ship and began carrying passengers again. Although she was only built in 1954, she was now the largest British steam driven ship. She had two perfect reciprocal steam powered engines, very similar to those of the 'Titanic'.

As the Container Revolution gradually changed our lives in the cargo liners, we were now based in Southampton rather than Liverpool and Glasgow, and I began to become familiar with the Charity operating 'Shieldhall' and had several retired friends amongst her volunteer crew.

Just at a time I was retiring from P&O Containers and transferring to Hanseatic, a German company based in Cyprus, then managing the foreign section of the U.S. Sea Land company, the famous Film company Paramount asked to charter the 'Shieldhall, to star in a film they were making. This of course was wonderful news to the Charity operating the 'Shieldhall' as it included painting the ship as required for the film, and then when the film was finished, re-painting in her original colours. It was planned for her to sail to Dublin Bay, where the ship would become an Irish Emigrant ship, and the star was to be Helen Mirren, acting the part of Bobby Sands' mother. The volunteer crew would take part in the film. Then a problem arose.

Although the 'Shieldhall' crew contained several retired captains, none held the latest requirement for a Foreign going ship master's qualifications, a GMDSS certificate (Global Maritime Distress and Safety System).

Luckily the Company had sent me for a week's course in Leith College, Edinburgh, to obtain the certificate, and I was the only one already holding the qualification. And thus, I was asked to take the job.

So there I was, having just retired from the M.V. 'Peninsular Bay' in Southampton, found myself appointed Captain of the S.S. 'Shieldhall'.

I was told that I would be supplied with the uniform of an Emigrant ship master of the time and, together with the Committee, ordered £5000 worth of fuel, sufficient for the voyage to Dublin and back.

However, it was to be my shortest command ever, as due to some unexpected terrorist activity in Belfast, the film company decided to withdraw the ship's part in the film and cancelled the charter. The film 'Some Mother's Son' was eventually made but our ship did not get its free coats of paint and a large amount of fuel. Nor did the crew become film stars.

I'm very pleased to say that the 'Shieldhall' is still operating from Southampton and is well worth visiting, should you be in that area.



## Holiday miscellany

### **The Maritime Advocate online Issue 861 July 26th 2024**

By *Michael Grey MBE*

**Y**ou can tell that the summer holidays have arrived when the more bizarre items to be found in the media start to proliferate, like well fertilised flower beds. When I worked for the only daily newspaper that specialised in maritime matters, we could guarantee that we would have an earnest request from some otherwise reputable organ to answer questions about some new theory about the Titanic, which had suddenly been unearthed by some questing scribe. Could we do a “to camera” interview on the latest sensation about the Bermuda triangle, which has revealed that it is really a tetrahedron?



This year will be no different, with yet another expedition to the Titanic wreck site, while what has become known as the “Titanic shipyard” in Belfast (you would have thought that this was the only ship they ever built) is making headlines for all the wrong reasons, teetering on the financial abyss once again. But this holiday season will surely be more memorable than most, on account of the greatest ever global computer meltdown, which we are assured was caused by a simple error rather than some malign interference. We better believe them, at least until the team redeployed from the Titanic story come up with what really caused the chaos. And at sea there are fresh navigational warnings about not taking your GPS readouts too literally, with reports from several areas, such as the Baltic, Eastern Mediterranean, the Gulf, South China Sea, and the Black Sea, all suggesting that more old-fashioned forms of navigation should be recommended. Maybe it should be regarded as useful practice, should the curse of the “blue screens” suddenly infect technology afloat.

It is not a wholly ridiculous idea. Some things are surprising, others utterly predictable. In the latter category is the sad fact that filthy weather off the Cape of Good Hope is playing merry hell with the schedules of the shipping which has been diverted by the Houthi warfare on the Red Sea Route. Forty boxes over the side and another thirty damaged from one ship might just be the start as the winter takes its toll on the summer cargoes.

There is increasing angst about cruise ships making life for the locals insupportable during the holiday season and a growing number of destinations actively attempting to ration their visits, or even ban them. The anti-tourist contagion is spreading from ports to holiday destinations in general, with angry locals being offensive to visitors peacefully sitting in cafes.

You might have some sympathy for both sides in this intractable problem. The tourists, who have somehow managed to reach their destinations after their flights had been cancelled because of computer meltdowns, “flight-shamed” by their eco-fanatic neighbours and charged extortionate taxi fares from the airport, might feel entitled to a little relaxation. The locals, who probably bear little ill-will to hapless visitors, see them not as individuals, but a human tide. It could be an opportunity for ferry operators to stress their more sustainable credentials, always supposing that the “just stop oil fanatics” and their ilk do not glue themselves to the linkspan. It would be good to escape for a few weeks from the guilt which the eco-loons are intent on inflicting on us all, which probably means just staying at home.

At least the IMO, with its proliferating army of green NGOs, will be on holiday for a few weeks. Will the Carbon Intensity Index question, which is causing such universal objections, with its “one size fits all mandate” be resolved? This will spoil a lot of holidays. Surely, everyone will have realised that there is no silver bullet on the marine fuel question, with wind propulsion about the only truly “carbon neutral” solution, at least until somebody discovers that all the sails and masts and rotors are manufactured in some Chinese foundry fuelled by brown coal.

Ammonia, LNG, Hydrogen, methanol, batteries, scrubbers – whatever the solution, there will be some snag unearthed which will be played heavily by whatever green NGO is specially tasked with objecting to it. And while the micro-nuclear reactors seem a delightful route to getting some speed back at sea, you can deduce what the objections to this will comprise. Answers on a single sheet of paper.

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## Gone Aloft

**Sally Redfearn**, on the 7<sup>th</sup> June after a battle with cancer. A local girl, she worked in the the travel industry in the United States before going to sea as an assistant purser on cruise ships. She worked for Cunard for 23 years, from 1973 - 1996, first on the small ships and then on the QE2. She joined the Club in 2013 and was a regular at the Curry lunches and other functions.



**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 28<sup>th</sup> 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.

Gordon's funeral will take place at Test Valley Crematorium at 1200 on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> September .