

**The Merchant Navy Association**  
from ship to shore, from past to present



# Full Ahead

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Autumn 2021

£2.50



**Your** **MERCHANT NAVY ASSOCIATION**

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Every year the Shipwrecked Mariners' Society pays over £1M in grants to the dependants of those lost at sea, as well as sick, disabled and retired seafarers struggling to make ends meet. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we have received an unprecedented level of demand for financial assistance from members of the maritime community experiencing hardship and distress. Please help us to continue our important work – **thank you.**

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## Shipwrecked Mariners' Society

*Supporting the seafaring community for over 180 years*

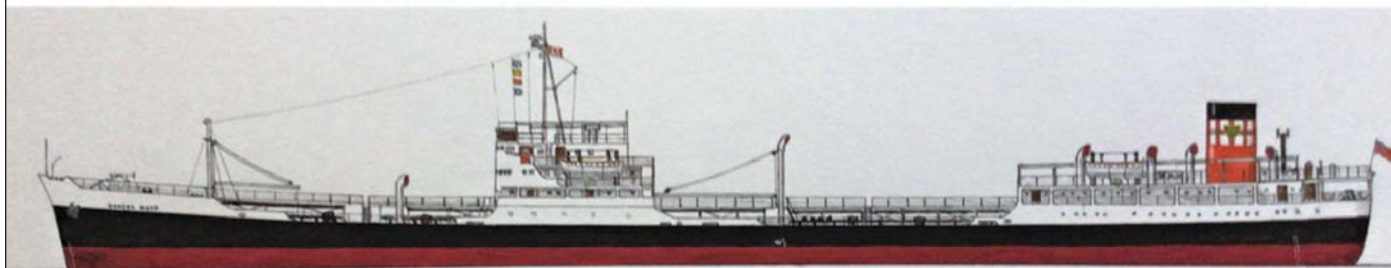
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Reg Charity No 212034  
Inst. 1839

## SHIPS IN PROFILE

David A Parsons



### *m.v. Border Keep*

Lowland Tanker Co. Ltd

Managed by Common Brothers; Chartered to BP Shipping

Completed 1953 – Blythswood Shipbuilding Co. Ltd, Scotstoun, Glasgow

Gross 11,321 tons; DWT 16,000 tons; Length o.a. 547' 0" Breadth o.a. 69' 0"

Engine 7,040 bhp 6-cylinder Doxford diesel; Single screw; Service speed 13.75 knots

Call Sign: MQRM

Dismantled; 1970 – Kaohsiung, Taiwan

Steve Whalley, 2nd Radio Officer (first voyage) – December 1966 to February 1967

**Price Guide:** Cargo vessels, tankers etc £70. Passenger vessel starts at £90 Warships & Aircraft also undertaken  
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**Website;** [www.shipsinprofile.com](http://www.shipsinprofile.com)

**Contact:** David Parsons Tel 01935 414765

**Email;** [davidprofiles@btinternet.com](mailto:davidprofiles@btinternet.com)

## Letter from the Editor

Hi Everyone,

Once again a big thank you to everyone who has sent me articles, letters, etc. Without your contributions there would be no magazine and I know how much it is looked forward to by many of you.

I am enjoying editing the magazine because it enables me to stay in touch with my many MNA friends and has also led to me making new ones. As many of you know my husband, John Turner, crossed the bar just before last Christmas and it has been a very lonely time for me, particularly as it happened during lockdown. The contact I have had through e-mails and telephone calls have helped me a great deal and I have discovered that there are many people out there who need the social contact. Seafarers love to talk about their time at sea, for many of them some of the happiest times of their lives and they have wonderful tales to tell. Getting to branch meetings becomes more difficult as we get older and Covid has severely restricted our opportunities for socialisation. Please try to keep in touch with members who are alone, the difference it makes is huge, a phone call means so much. Everyone needs to feel that they matter.

The branch in the spotlight this time is Bristol and David Parsons, our national secretary, is featured in "Meet the Team".

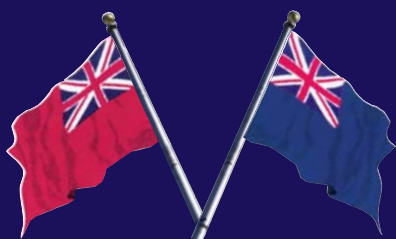
In the next edition I shall featuring Merchant Navy Day pictures and a feature on "Memories of Christmas", either memories from childhood or your time at sea so get writing and let's share some happy memories.

It has been great to see that some of the branches are up and running again and that new events are beginning to happen, I am always interested to hear of your activities past, present and future.

Continue to keep safe.

**Sandra**

**Contact me at 01889 585588**  
**fullahead@mna.org.uk**



## All in a name

### "Wings Barry"

At the unveiling of the Bristol Memorial almost 30 years ago, HRH Princess Anne was curious about the Bristol standard bearers name "Wings", but the secret was not revealed as he had 'left the ship without the masters permission!'

I had thought it was associated with the swallows tattooed on his hands but they were a family emblem as all his family were seafarers, indeed Wings sailor dad worked in Avonmouth docks til he was 84! Just to be close to ships no doubt. Wings himself joined the sea cadets aged 12 which brokered his interest to become a seafarer.

Jumping forward after many long voyages he and a couple of friends decided to change career as it were and took advantage of their ambition to go grape picking whilst in Venice. Just as the ship was leaving port they jumped from the stern into the canal to pursue their dream. This episode was watched by a crowd of onlookers as the ship sailed away and many took photographs. A strong arm helped him out of the canal and after saying 'Thanks a lot' the strong arm of the policeman took him and his friends to jail! The shipping agent took them by ferry to the British consulate to be deported, but not before news headlines in the paper announced that 'English mariners fly like birds and swim like fish! From then on he was known as 'Wings!'

This is just one of the many tales from a life at sea but it was his 20 years as our National Standard bearer that filled him with pride and created amazing memories for him to reflect on now that his health has deteriorated. The recognition afforded to our Association was highlighted by the professional representation of our Standard at hundreds of major events over the years both at home and abroad. Stand out events such as the Menai gate remembrance, the Gurkhas parade down Whitehall, and leading the parade for the 25th anniversary of the Falklands Conflict both on Horseguards Parade and then marching down the Mall to Buckingham Palace for the fly past. So, so many more! Tears were often in his eyes at these events but none more so than when we went to Arramanches for the unveiling of the MN memorial there and took a trip to Omaha beach with one of our friends who had been washed up there on D Day, Never having visited that beach since that day Wings accompanied him to the beach and raw emotion overtook them both. Wings dedication came straight from the heart and he carried out his duties with honour and dignity.

He may have jumped ship in his youth, but by contrast he was piped aboard the 'Campbelltown' RN frigate during a visit to France and the irony of it was that it was his sons first ship.

Wings has so many wonderful stories to tell as many of our seafarers do and I am sure Sandra would love you to send her some!

By Vivien Foster, National President, MNA

## 150th Anniversary: New Zealand Shipping Company

### Expression of Interest

It is planned to have a reunion in March 2023, for all previous employees/partners, to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of the formation of the New Zealand Shipping Company.

This is an open invitation to everyone that was employed by the New Zealand Shipping Company or Associate Companies.

As we are all in the more senior time of life, and long distance traveling becomes less comfortable, a twin venue event, one in the UK, and one in NZ, will be held.

It would involve a weekend of events with

the main feature being a Celebratory Luncheon or Dinner.

Could you please let me know, by email to, rogerkblake@hotmail.com if you would be interested in attending this event, and in which country. Venues and costs will be calculated, once we have some idea of the numbers. Please also advise, if you would be happy being in the organising team.

If you know of anyone else who also worked for NZSCo, and who might be interested in attending, please forward this email address on to them.

Roger Blake. Organiser.



# Meet the Team: David Parsons, National Secretary



Whilst my love of the sea and ships goes back as long as I can remember, the reasons have mystified me. I have traced my family origins back for many generations and not one was a seafarer. Born in 1947 and brought up in Middlesex meant that all I knew about the sea came from books and many of those had illustrations and photographs of magnificent ships, often in faraway places. Every so often my parents would take me to Chatham or Portsmouth for Navy Days and also sometimes to London or Southampton

docks. Who could fail to be impressed by all those vessels, most flying a white or red ensign? My early ambition was to join the Royal Navy and I spent two week long holidays on board the TS Foudroyant in Portsmouth Harbour where youngsters were given a basic insight into life afloat.

At the age of 14 my parents packed me off to the Training Ship Mercury, in Hamble, Hampshire for three years. There we spent the days ashore in the classroom and nights on board the hulk of the former HMS Gannet – now restored and preserved in Chatham Historic Dockyard. We supplemented our education with lessons on seamanship and navigation. Conditions were harsh. We were subjected to naval style discipline, with regular drills. Bullying was commonplace, particularly for the first-year cadets and we quickly learned how to keep our heads down. The ship had been hulked as an RNR drill ship around the turn of the last century. She had been dismantled to allow an enclosed upper deck to be added, where we slept in hammocks. It was bitterly cold in winter and often the wooden deck was covered in ice. Despite all this it prepared us well. I have many good memories and have some lifelong friends that I meet with regularly. One surprise was that almost all the boys who went to sea joined the Merchant Navy. I was no exception. In 1964 was sent for an interview with Shaw Savill & Albion Line, in London, to be offered a three-year apprenticeship. My time at Mercury had secured me a year's remission on my indentures.

I joined my first ship, my Carnatic, in the Gladstone Dock, Liverpool in December 1964. Three weeks later we sailed for New Zealand into a force 9 gale and for the only time in my life, I succumbed to awful sea sickness. Once we reached calm waters I began to enjoy life aboard the ship that was to be home for four voyages over two years. It is hard to believe in these days that each voyage we would visit numerous ports, first to discharge then to load, and we were never alongside for less than a week. What a wonderful way to see the world! I then made two more voyages on other vessels. After passing my 2nd Mates Certificate, I joined their one-class passenger ship, Northern Star for eighteen glorious months as 21 year-old junior third mate – what fun that was!

I left Shaw Savill in 1970 as the company began to contract and joined the Royal Fleet Auxiliary where I sailed on tankers, an ammunition ship and a landing ship. There can be few things more exciting than replenishment at sea, operating with helicopters and keeping station in a task force. Add to this was that we were warmly welcomed in almost every overseas port. What a wonderful way of life.

When I passed my Master's Certificate in 1977 it coincided with the arrival of a young family and I joined Thorsen Car Ferries operating out of Southampton and Portsmouth. I remained there for 16 years, through the takeover by P&O Ferries, until 1993 when I left as a master to come ashore.

I like to hope that my time at sea prepared me well for the last part of my career. I was hugely lucky to be offered the position of chief executive of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board, then based in London. My immediate and greatest challenge was to save the last Merchant Navy Hotel from closure. This was haemorrhaging large amounts of money, but with the help of trustees we gave it another 8 years of life. Sadly, occupancy began to fall against a need for extensive refurbishment and in 2001 we accepted substantial offer from a developer. The work of the Board is, of course, wide-ranging and its primary role has always been to co-ordinate and support the charities caring for merchant seafarers and fishermen in the UK and more recently, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. To do this it works with its constituent members, including the MNA and its many port welfare committees. The capital released from the sale of the Hotel has enabled it to do so much more subsequently. I retired in 2017 and look back on my 24 years there as among the happiest of my life.

When the MNA was looking for new trustees, two years ago, I contacted John Sail who I have known for many years and offered to help. The rest is, as they say, history. I am both delighted and proud to be your National Secretary – a position where I hope my experience in the maritime and charity sectors can be of help.

My most abiding memories of have been of all those wonderful people I have worked with or met. That I can continue to do this today, through our Association, is a huge privilege.



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## 2021 MNA National AGM – Change of venue etc

The 2021 AGM will now take place at

**Tyseley Working Men's Club**

**573 Warwick Road**

**Birmingham B11 2EX**

**on**

**Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October at 11.30am**

Immediately following this will be a Council meeting to which all members are welcome.

There will be a buffet lunch at around 1.00pm

Inserted into this edition is a revised agenda and a Voting Return Form for those unable to attend.

The agenda can also be found on; <https://www.mna.org.uk/index.php/organisation/agms>

**If you wish to attend**, please notify David Parsons, National Secretary

49 The Park, Yeovil BA20 1DF or Email; [secretary@mna.org.uk](mailto:secretary@mna.org.uk)



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[www.nautilusint.org](http://www.nautilusint.org)

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## Merchant Navy Welfare Board – the UK Maritime Charity Making a Big Impact

**For over 70 years the hard-working trustees and staff of the Merchant Navy Welfare Board (MNWB), known across the sector as ‘the Board’, have quietly and efficiently supported the UK maritime charity sector and the provision of quality welfare services to serving and retired seafarers, fishers and their families.**

The Board was established in 1948, although its predecessors date back to 1927. In the early days its Council membership came from the ship owners, seafarers' trade unions, nautical charities and the Government who provided funding via levies on British ship owners employing the many non-domiciled seamen. As the industry evolved the Board inherited several hostels and clubs, Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) were also transferred and most charities caring for merchant seafarers and fishermen, became Constituent members. From the 1970s the major changes in merchant shipping had a significant impact on the Board's hotels making all but the London hotel redundant. As a result, several clubs were transferred to the societies providing port-based welfare. Government support and direct involvement was also withdrawn at that time. In 2002, the Board took the view that it was increasingly difficult to justify the need to retain the last remaining hotel, in London and the property was sold for redevelopment. The capital raised, from the sale was invested to increase the Board's income. This greatly enhanced the levels of support to that it could give to its Constituent members and

much needed advice, pastoral care, education, financial assistance and accommodation to those in need. “All of our 45 Constituent member organisations have collaborated to provide an outstanding level of support during this challenging, ongoing pandemic,” added Mr Tomlin.

### MNWB

Chairman, Capt. Andrew Cassels

explains, “We have always been a somewhat low-profile organisation because much of what we do happens behind the scenes and is in support of the charities that provide critical front-line welfare services.” The MNWB's contribution to seafarers' welfare recently received formal recognition with the signing of an agreement between the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, an executive agency of the Department for Transport, and the MNWB. The MoU formally designated the MNWB as the UK's National Seafarers' Welfare Board in accordance with ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 and ILO C188 Work in Fishing Convention. In recognition of an already strong relationship between MCA and the MNWB, this formal agreement demonstrates the UK government's ongoing commitment to seafarers' and fishers' welfare and has most recently included support to get crews home during the pandemic.

MNWB's sixteen Port Welfare Committees (PWCs) and Seafarers' Welfare Board (SWB) based in and around the major ports throughout the UK and Gibraltar, remain an essential and integral part of the Board's work. MNWB Deputy Chief Executive Sharon Coveney said, “The contribution made by PWC members provides the Board and its Constituents with a better understanding of issues that affect seafarers locally, nationally and internationally.” Each committee comprises of organisation representatives concerned with the welfare of seafarers visiting their ports and the local maritime community. Members are drawn from various backgrounds, including representatives from shipowners, trade unions, port owners/authorities, local government and the maritime charities who provide accommodation, conduct ship welfare visits and operate seafarers' centres.



the wider seafaring community.

Today, the Board's work continues to evolve in line with the maritime sector, recognising the changes that affect both serving and retired seafarers, and their dependants. “The Board is a unique, secular and financially self-sufficient maritime charity that acts as the umbrella charity for the UK Merchant Navy & Fishing Fleets and the National Seafarers' Welfare Board,” states Peter Tomlin MBE, Chief Executive. The Board's trustees consist of an equal number of ship owners (appointed by the UK Chamber of Shipping), maritime trade unions (appointed by Nautilus International and RMT), the maritime charity sector and persons able to make a particular contribution to the work of the charity. The MNWB exists primarily to support its Constituent member organisations who are its stakeholders. These include Shipowners (UK Chamber of Shipping), maritime unions (Nautilus International and RMT) and numerous local, national and international maritime charities around the country, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. These charities provide



Over the years the Board has used its funds to create and manage projects that improve access to charitable services in the sector and awards grants to organisations to enhance welfare services around the UK, Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands. It also manages a number of working groups to which is members with similar interests can meet regularly together. These review current trends, legislation and best practice and the MNA is regular contributor.

The Board created the unique Seafarer Support website [www.seafarerssupport.org](http://www.seafarerssupport.org) which acts as the central source of information for the entire range of help available from the UK maritime charity sector. It covers serving and retired Merchant Navy, Fishers, Royal Navy/Royal Marines personnel and their families. The website signposts users to the organisations best suited to help in times of need. For those who are unable to access the internet or simply prefer to use the phone, Seafarer Support also has a freephone helpline 0800 121 4765.

To help its Constituent member organisations provide important welfare services nationally and internationally, the Board creates, operates, and administers numerous projects, such as the

International Port Welfare Partnership programme and Ship Welfare Visitor Course. Most recently, MNWB created the UK Ports MiFi project. Working in partnership with the Department for Transport, The Seafarers' Charity (formerly Seafarers UK) and front-line ship visiting organisations, the collaborative project provides free WiFi to seafarers and fishers in UK ports. With Covid restrictions severely limiting shore leave and crew changes, the project continues to connect seafarers with their families and friends during the ongoing pandemic.

The Board continues to move from strength to strength bringing the maritime community together and facilitating collaboration during challenging times. Mr Tomlin concludes, "These are unprecedented times for everyone, particularly seafarers, fishers and their families and MNWB is playing its part by bringing the charity sector together like never before. Whilst we maintain our good work and have some outstanding projects in the pipeline, our success greatly depends on our excellent relations with our fellow maritime charities and the dedication of our outstanding PWCs, all of whom provide their services voluntarily."

We are pleased to be working ever more closely with the Merchant Navy Association and our previous Chief Executive, David Parsons, now your National Secretary. He will be working with us to encourage more branches to become members of our Port Welfare Committees, something that we both agree will be mutually and hugely beneficial.

For further information about the work of the MNWB, please visit [www.mnwb.org](http://www.mnwb.org)



## NEED A LIFELINE? WE CAN HELP!

Sometimes we need a little help navigating life's problems. Seafarer Support provides a free confidential telephone and unique online referral service for serving and retired UK seafarers and their families.

Our website will guide you to the services available from a range of UK charities and organisations. For those who prefer to speak to someone in person, please call our trained staff during office hours.

We are waiting to connect you to the right people during times of need.

Contact us now!

[www.seafarerssupport.org](http://www.seafarerssupport.org)  
**0800 122 4765**





# Three Rivers Race

Horning Sailing Club who organise the famous annual 3 Rivers Race have invited members of the MNA BC Waterwatch team to operate "Guard Ship" for next year's race and Clive Edwards has accepted and has to provide a crew as there has to be a minimum of four crew aboard in case there's a shout and two crew members have to use one of the Horning Club's rescue boats.

## Three Rivers Race

The Three Rivers Race is one of the oldest remaining on the Broads sailing calendar. Running every year since 1961, usually on the first weekend after the Whitsun Bank Holiday, it is also one of the largest inland yachting races in Europe, encompassing three rivers and two lakes or broads in rural Norfolk. Originally, the plan was to have boats crossing the estuary at Breydon Water with the three rivers being the Bure, Yare and Waveney. However, from a safety and tide aspect this proved impractical so the northern Broadland rivers of the Bure, Thurne and Ant were used instead, and remain the Three Rivers of the Race to this day.

The current challenge sees helms negotiate a course in the order of 45-50 miles, depending on conditions, rounding four buoys located at Ludham Bridge on the Ant, on South Walsham Broad or Fleet Dyke, on Hickling Broad at the top end of the River Thurne and downstream on the River Bure somewhere between Stokesby and Six Mile House heading towards Great Yarmouth, starting and finishing at Horning Sailing Club on the upper Bure. The time limit for this is 24 hours from each boat's start time. There are also 4 mast lowerings required on the course to negotiate the pair of bridges at Potter Heigham and also the bridge at Acle both ways. Despite all of these obstacles and sometimes complex rigs, the fastest boats such as Norfolk Punts and visiting Thames A Raters can complete the race in as little as 7 hours given favourable conditions. For those boats which cannot get back in time for a swift pint in the Swan, a cooked breakfast is provided at the finish in the clubhouse to revive weary sailors.

All of the boats are tracked at Horning Sailing Club for safety purposes. A team of 10 fixed motor cruiser guardships plus a range of other safety vessels keep an eye out for any problems and report back to base via radio. The efficiency of this system was underlined in 2001 when, for the only time so far in the race's history, strong winds caused abandonment of the race. Having issued the command from base at 6pm, all crews and the vast majority of boats were either at their home moorings or back at Horning Sailing Club by 11pm, despite being up to 15 miles away by river, thanks to the safety network. Progress around the course is tracked using computer software which allows the Race Controller to see in an instant on which stretch of water each competitor was last reported by a guardship.

The start of the race is the time for spectators to view the fleet in one concentrated mass, waiting to be started in groups of around 10 boats upstream of the start line at Horning Sailing Club. The first start is usually at 11am and it takes over an hour to get the whole fleet started. Once the fleet has reached Thurne Mouth, yachts can usually be seen heading off in both directions, and this decision is probably the most critical one of the whole race, dependant as it is on wind, tide and boat performance. The Three Rivers Race really is a test of seamanship over a long period and covering a wide variety of areas from close-quarters boat handling at the start to light airs sailing overnight and control at the bridge zones. Crews have travelled to Horning from all over the World to take part in a variety of craft, including the impressive Thames A Raters, Norfolk Punts, Half-Deckers, Yeomans, Yare and Bure ODs (White Boats), Reedlings, Rebels, Wayfarers, Enterprises and other dinghies, traditional Broads River Cruisers and Production Cruisers. No single-handed craft are allowed.

For more information about the Three Rivers Race, please visit [www.3rr.uk](http://www.3rr.uk)

**Horning Sailing Club**

# Commemoration of the first Arctic Convoy ... 12th August 1941

On the 12th August 1941 the first Arctic Convoy left Liverpool for Arkhangelsk, Russia, which arrived on 31st August 1941. This was the first of many convoys to help the Russian people in their fight against the Nazi invasion. Winston Churchill called the convoys 'The worst journey in the world'.

The convoys had to run the German blockades in perilous waters in freezing winter conditions. In summer 24 hours of daylight meant constant attack from the air and beneath the sea. Around 1,400 merchant vessels made the hazardous journey to the Soviet Union escorted by ships of the Royal Navy, Royal Canadian and US Navy. Over 3000 allied sailors, merchant seamen, soldiers and airmen died in the Arctic convoys. 85 merchant vessels and 16 Royal Navy ships were also lost. And we should not forget the courageous Soviet veterans who fought too, and many Soviet merchant seamen who lost their lives in this campaign.

I and my fellow members from the Wirral Branch of MNA were privileged to be at the Commemoration of the first Arctic Convoy at the parish church of Liverpool, Our Lady & St Nicholas, lovingly known as St. Nicks, on the 12th August 2021. After the service we were invited to Liverpool Town Hall where I met 2 veterans and spoke to them about the convoys. They played down all the fuss and

said they were only doing their duty. I was so proud to be in their company for a short time. Thank goodness we had seafarers like that during the war.

The Russian Ambassador gave a very heart warming speech to thank the 2 veterans and the convoys for their help in defeating the German Invasion.

The inspiring service was followed by a wreath laying ceremony in the gardens of St Nick's church.

**Arthur Speed**





# The Great Homer Street Buoy

A group of seamen volunteers have restored the Great Homer Street Buoy in memory of the city's merchant seamen past and present and as a tribute to former Liverpool MNA chairman Bill Anderson who died from Covid last year. The buoy on the corner of Great Homer Street and Scotland Road was felt to deserve some TLC as it was of great historical significance to Liverpool and many people who come into and leave Liverpool drive past it. A group of four volunteers Jeff Rawlinson a former petty officer, Mersey pilot Kevin Walsh, current MNA chairman Liverpool Alfie Hincks and Lee Patten a former chief officer for Svitzer Tug Company.

Mersey Docks and Harbour Company maintain buoys in the river and they mark the position of deep water channels used by ships when entering the docks and local shipping hazards. Each buoy has a number that appears on it and charts of the river. Commissioned in 1950 the one on Great Homer Street was stationed in a variety of locations from Garston Docks to the entrance to the Mersey. It has marked hazards including the WWII gunnery platform Fort Maunsell and Pluckington Bank, south of the Pierhead and known as Duke's Buoy. Bearing the number of it's last station, Q7, it sank and was lost off the coast of Formby before being rediscovered when a new buoy was being stationed. Q7 was raised and salvaged in 1979 and was placed in its current position in 1981.

Before the death of Bill Anderson meetings had been held about the lack of recognition to those who served in the Merchant Navy in the city and so it seemed fitting that the buoy should be restored in memory of a man who was a leading figure in the seafaring world,

and a former National Union of Seaman and ITF Seafarers Trust official. It is hoped to place a bench near the buoy with a plaque bearing his name.

It took three days to clean up the buoy, removing years of dirt and rust, and three days to repaint it using its original colours using 25 litres a special polyurethane marine paint which had been donated. It took a great deal of effort but it was worth it and the response has been fantastic. Eventually it is hoped to erect signposts with the points of the compass.

It is the perfect memorial to Bill and to the many Merchant Navy seamen, especially those who lost their lives, who came from that area. It was also felt that the buoy would also be a tribute to another seaman, Tony Santamera, better known as "Starry", and a former National Secretary of the NUS and who along with Bill was a great fighter for the Merchant Navy and was born and bred not far from the buoy.



Image courtesy of The Guide, Liv



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# Celebrating VE / VJ Day

On Saturday 21st August at the Festival Hall Kirkby in Ashfield, Mansfield and Ashfield MNA celebrated VE/VJ Day by attempting to reconstruct a street party for Kirkby residents. There were 250 people in attendance and everything started with the Siren and the British Legion, Union and the Mansfield and Ashfield standards parading into the hall.

A short service was led by their padre the Rev. Kevin Charles and this was followed by the epitaph, a minutes silence and the National Anthem,

The party then commenced. Tables were laid with cups, saucers and plates and sandwiches including some specially made with dripping by the local butcher. Home made cakes and sponges and jam tarts filled with home made jam were also available. Flags and flowers completed the picture. The Blue Bird Trio sang songs from the 40s and later Paul ran a disco for dancing. Everyone seemed to enjoy the afternoon.

A lot of hard work went into the event and everyone, including branch members, did a brilliant job. Thanks must go to all of them.





# The Radio & the Sword, A short True Story

At the time, in the mid 1960's, the LST Radio Officer's job was probably one of the better ones to get a hold of. The contract was annual which meant twelve-month trips without the ship returning to the UK as the fleets were based on Malta, Aden and Singapore so we flew out and back home, flying itself was quite novel in those days. At that time it was not unusual to do 12 months voyages, especially for Radio Officers working for the likes of Marconi or in the more lucrative freelance market.

The LST's (Landing Ship Tank) were run for the military, principally the Army & Air Force, to do their maritime running about such as storing some of the more remote bases and delivering troops to and from exercises. It was jokingly known as the Army's Private Navy' and that wasn't so far away from the truth. It was also part of the Amphibious Warfare Fleet, as such it was the sort of interesting work not normally seen by merchant seamen, involvement with the military was different, sometimes challenging and invariably rewarding. The Radio Officer's pay was set at good free-lance rates, leave was higher than the norm with the added bonus of usually 30 days stand by leave at the end of normal leave. The manning was UK British Officers with Hong Kong Chinese crew in the Middle East fleet and Singapore Chinese crew in the Far East fleet.

The conditions reflected the type of work we were involved in, occasionally carrying explosives in large quantities and sometimes in dubious condition. We went wherever the army needed us to go and being a part of the Amphibious Warfare Squadron we were expected to perform accordingly should it be required. We were over-manned as a fleet by normal MN standards but there was a good reason for this, which was the need to be able to man the reserve ships with Fleet experienced officers at very short notice. The ships were built in 1944/45 for the Normandy landings and were the first real Roll On/Roll Off ships, the forerunners of what we now know as 'Roll On Roll Off' ferries – every one of which has an LST hidden away inside it somewhere - which was fine if the port we visited had a 'hard' to land the bow door ramp onto and the cargo was all vehicular, but in those places where everything had to come in and out through the after hatch it was quite a different story altogether.

When news of a 'special' filtered through we were in the mid social whirlwind of Aden, you might be surprised at the level of social activity in those days if Aden was your base port. We didn't know what this 'special' was but the 'LST Empire Gull' was always up for something different and this was no exception. Eventually it transpired that, due to the Navy being fully engaged with the then 'Beira Patrol' duties, a ship was needed to carry out 'show the flag' duties at a very small British Protectorate along the Arabian southern coastline. It was to be done as a diversion outbound on our next run to Masirah and Bahrain and was just up our street.

The Khuriya Muriya Islands are a small group of Islands off the southern Arabian coast and about 600 nautical miles eastward from Aden, the lat and long position being approximately 17-30 North and 56-30 East. Masirah is about 240 nautical miles further on. Only one island was inhabited or believed to be habitable and this was to be our destination. The mission was to deliver presents from the British Government to show that we still cared, and to collect a population census from the headman. A simple job you might think and sure it was really, it just conspired to throw up few difficulties to find solutions for.

Our destination was a bay inside the island group and thus sheltered from the swells of the Indian Ocean, there were two villages on the island each being occupied alternately according to the direction of the prevailing monsoon weather, these were located at the only wells providing fresh water on the island and one or the other would be exposed to the monsoon weather thus instigating the constant trekking between them by the locals so they could use the sheltered well.

We had been told that the islanders would be expecting our arrival as they had a radio on the island and listened to a mainland commercial radio station, which made a number of broadcasts telling them both when we were arriving and describing the ship, as it was somewhat different from the Royal Naval Grey Funnel Liner they were used to seeing.

All went well and we were steaming carefully toward the anchorage when we spotted a figure running like mad up this large hill. Arms and legs were pumping wildly as he raced along the skyline looking a bit like a cartoon figure, on he ran without seemingly a pause for breath and it looked to be some steep slope at that. Eventually, when he had got to the top, we could make out a flagpole with the aid of binoculars and after more frantic activity the biggest Union Flag I have ever seen burst out from the top of the flagpole.

How nice we thought, what a welcome and we duly dipped our Blue Ensign in acknowledgement not knowing if that would be understood or not. Still at least we thought we are in the right place then! The poor guy, who had done all that running had, by this time, understandably collapsed into a heap.

We continued on and leisurely dropped anchor to await events. Apart from a crowd on the beached apparently armed with some sort of rifles nothing happened, we waited but couldn't see any sign of any boats to come out to us, so it was decided we would go to them. One of the two motor lifeboats was launched, we had four lifeboats two of which were motorised, regularly used and they started first swing of the starter handle, which was quite novel in those days of petrol lifeboat engines. Off the intrepid crew went to the beach with a few sample goodies to smooth the way only to be met by a hostile group, waving muzzle-loading muskets at them. Discretion being the better part of valour they returned to the 'Gull' and sent the boat back with the Chief Officer resplendent in his gold braided whites.

He had better luck and managed to bribe four men out to the ship for a confab, the problem was that in their infinite wisdom the powers in Aden had omitted to send a translator, we didn't have any Arabic and they didn't have any English. By much arm waving, gesticulation and picture drawing, it was established who we were and this was a major step forward turning scowls into smiles. After they had taken stock of the gifts piled up for them on the deck, the four then insisted on being taken back ashore so they could return with the headman.

After a while the headman came out with a suitable entourage and we finally got the full story surrounding our arrival amid much oil on troubled waters, a lot of guesswork and final understanding in drawings and gesticulation. It all boiled down to the simple fact that their radio was broken, therefore they hadn't heard the broadcasts made, they had no idea who we were and thought that

they were about to be invaded! The guy running up the hill didn't break out the flag in welcome at all, they were really saying 'bugger off, we are British and if you invade us the Brits will come and get you!', such was their confidence in the Union Flag – how things change.

The muskets on the beach were for real, loaded to repel invasion and apparently constituted the entire island arsenal. The ship with its black hull, white accommodation and buff blacktopped funnel was nothing like the naval finery they were accustomed to and our blue ensign meant nothing as they could not see it properly from the beach and anyway had only ever seen a white one. No wonder they were getting themselves in a tizzy.

In a display of infinite wisdom and meanness the Captain volunteered my services to repair their defunct radio, instead of acquiring a replacement one, which he could easily have done from one of the privately owned simple radios on the ship and have that replaced on our return to Aden. They could have had mine for that matter and saved me from trial by sword. At one stage, if I could have got out of the radio room, I would have gone down and got it for them! However this is jumping ahead of the tale.

It was mid morning when I was informed of the Captain's benevolent arrangement and without any further forewarning a small skinny guy appeared clutching a rather battered old transistor radio and accompanied by a large younger guy clutching a very impressive sword stuffed into his belt without even the nicety of a scabbard. It was all very much Arabian

Pirate scenario and not a little intimidating with the three of us crammed into a radio room about 9 foot square. The only saving grace being that there wasn't enough room to 'swing a cat' let alone his sword. (Oh for the benefit of the politically correct animal rights brigade, I should point out that a seafaring 'cat' is somewhat different to that of a land-lubber cat – it has nine tails for starters!).

Hanging onto the radio for dear life its keeper demonstrated that it didn't work, when I tried to take it off him he clung onto it hanging back and the big guy started playing with his sword. Great start I thought. Eventually I was able to persuade him that he needed to give it to me to get it repaired – not that I had much confidence of success in that field given its dilapidated state. First thing was to check the batteries, I had the compartment opened up and was pulling the batteries out before they realized what I was up to. This created uproar as they thought I was breaking it; there was much jabbering in Arabic, arm waving and the sword playing now included half drawing it out of the belt. I was rapidly becoming a very unhappy camper.

You must understand that this battered old radio was a treasured possession, the only one they had and their sole contact with the outside world. They had been given it, told how to switch it on and how to turn the volume up and down. That was it; they didn't even know how to tune it, as the tuning control was stuck down with what was left of electro tape and the pointer stuck at a red mark somebody had scribed on the scale. These guys were by no means stupid, they were simply living a

hundred years behind us, the nearest thing they had to the modern world was a blunderbuss and this battered radio, which they knew virtually nothing about. They had not even seen the batteries let alone knew what they were or what they did. They didn't know that the battery cover came off as the Navy did that for them changing the batteries every six months or so when they visited the island. This time it had been over twelve months since the last visit, so when I opened it up they understandably thought I was destroying it.

The one guy was the keeper of the radio with orders not to let it out his sight and if possible bring it back working, the other guy was the protector of the radio and probably had permission to chop off the head of any transgressor! I was just the poor sod who had to take it apart and fix it under the watchful gaze of the other two. It was the bloke with the sword that bothered me!

Taking one of the rusting leaking batteries I had removed, I put it alongside a nice shiny new one and finally managed to get across that rusty was bad and shiny was good. With that success under my belt I set about cleaning out and de-rusting the battery compartment with my every move being watched intently by my Arab companions. The wire connection to the spring negative terminal was on its last legs down to a single strand, but breaking that single strand in order to strip and re-solder caused another bout of unrest.

Battery wire soldered back in place and new batteries inserted made me the miracle man. The grins were huge and I went from bad guy to hero in a flash, only





there wasn't a flash was there, nothing, zilch, egdum kaput. Hey you think taking the batteries out was fun, you should have seen what happened when I started to take the casing apart. They simply couldn't believe what I was doing to their radio, I tried very hard to ignore them – especially the big guy and pressed on. Knobs were pulled off, casing undone, circuit boards removed and bits spread out on the desk in front of me.

The more I took it apart the longer the faces got, they got past being a threat because they were faced with the prospect of taking it back in bits and all that that implied. They seemed to realise that the only hope was that Joe Bloggs could put humpty dumpty back together again, so lay off Joe Bloggs – for now!

The radio was full of sand and muck with a fair number of dead livestock in there. The tuning condenser was almost stuffed with dead insects, there were various wires either off or, more helpfully, hanging by a thread at least I could see where they belonged. The tuning cord broke in mid fiddle and it wasn't just the heat that was making me sweat. Mr Sword was getting decidedly agitated.

I needed to check the speaker, if that wasn't working we were probably fighting a lost cause anyway, so I connected it to a battery and wonder of wonders it crackled so at least that worked. At the sound of the crackling speaker I started to revert from rogue to hero again, the long faces didn't actually grin but they did get shorter with a hint of a smile now and then. I had to clean and polish, remove the various dead bodies and growth off the circuit board. I ended up re-making all the soldered wire contacts and found a new tuning cord. Every now and then I cracked the speaker, which had the effect of boosting morale no end, both theirs and mine.

Finally we got to the rebuild stage, as the bits went back together my now friends got happier. With the casing back together and the knobs back on they were positively beaming – at least it looked like it did when they had brought it out to the ship and shinier too. The big fellow even stopped playing with his sword! Oh happy me! I popped the new batteries in and wonder of wonders it worked. The tuning was all off of course but that was a minor problem and I was a hero again – wowee! I fiddled with the tuning trying various stations till suddenly I was clapped on the back and amid much excitement I had stumbled on

their favourite spot on the dial, which I duly marked after having removed the previous marker.

Flushed with success I decided in for a penny I wanted the pound. First I showed the keeper of the radio how to tune it, he was frightened of touching that forbidden knob but eventually after much demonstration and persuasion he had a fiddle and delighted himself that he could re-tune and find the station he wanted. I started to show the big chap but it was made very clear that he was not allowed to touch, there was to be only one technician in the village!

The next hurdle was battery changing, that took a while but eventually, without a single word of common language, I was able to turn that man from being cautious of even turning the radio on and scared stiff of taking it apart into sort of understanding what the battery was for, which way round they had to fit, where they went and that all the batteries had to be correctly aligned. He also fathomed out when they needed changing and why. I set him tests to re-assure myself that he knew what to do. I felt like giving him a certificate as chief battery changer.

That man went ashore not only with a working radio but a spare box of batteries as well as the knowledge of how to change them. I often wonder how he got on after we left but he was certainly the island technocrat that day. I gave the two of them gifts of soap, about 12 bars of Lux each, which was like gold to them. Off they went ashore to be the local hero's and when I went ashore in the afternoon for a swim off the beach they appeared with their friends and a huge basket of fish for me to take my choice, I chose a really nice lobster.

Unfortunately, this was when I made my unforgivable mistake, they tried to give me more fish and being concerned that this would be part of the villages meagre food stocks I declined. There was much jabbering, pointing, offering of special morsels etc to tempt me but I was more than happy with the lobster and getting desperate to decline without insulting them. Out of somewhere came one of the very few Arabic words I knew 'Tamam' meaning good, "Tamam" I said holding up one finger and pointing to the lobster, "Tamam, Tamam" I repeated and smiles started to appear. I should have stopped there but instead, flushed with my success in Arabic, I stupidly mixed the languages. With a big smile I said "Much tamam,

plenty much tamam!" and the faces on these wonderful people fell, more fish was offered which I again declined sticking to my one lobster. Total confusion reigned, I knew there was a problem but didn't know what it was so couldn't set things right. It was only after we had departed that I discovered 'Mush', or something sounding very similar, is the negative and 'Mush tamam' is in fact bad! I still feel guilty about that as they really were great guys and the lobster was lovely.

According to the headman there were 85 people living on that Island, they had little or nothing by western standards and we were only allowed to meet the men. Women, children and the village were strictly off limits though I was allowed to see the village from a distance. They all appeared to be cheerful though; maybe they had something we do not! It was one of those unforgettable days and what made it all the more special was the knowledge of how privileged I had been to meet those guys and share that brief companionship and friendship.

In essence they were no different from me, they just wanted to put bread on the table and look after their families. They were good guys and once they trusted you were the sort of friends to have around when the chips were down. They may not have had much in the way education but they most certainly were not lacking in intelligence. The gifts we took were well received though little enough, some army issue shorts and shirts, various lengths of coloured cloth, some timber, as the islands had no trees. Knives and axes miscellaneous tools and a couple of small wooden fishing boats which were particularly welcomed as the boats they had previously had been damaged in a storm and they had been unable to repair them.

With no common language they were able by gesticulation and drawings to convey to us a great deal of what had happened since the last good will visit. That was a 'special' we all enjoyed and we sailed away with a feeling of satisfaction plus, certainly in my case, of having achieved something for a change.



# All polished up and Weymouth the place to go

Weymouth Armed Services / Veterans Week-end  
commemoration Ceremony at the Nothe Fort in Weymouth  
on Sunday 20th June 2021.









# Salvage of the Wavelet

By David Cornes

I recently had occasion to visit the Seafarers UK website. Seafarers UK is the current iteration of The King George's Fund for Sailors (K G F S) founded by King George 5th in 1917 to help alleviate the sufferings of seamen and fishermen as result of the First World War. King George 5th it was who later awarded us the title of 'The Merchant Navy'. The homepage opened with a picture of some cadets aboard a sail training ship, identified by her name on some lifebuoys as 'Tectona'. I was immediately reminded of an incident, perhaps I could call it an adventure, involving the 'Tectona' almost half a century ago.

In September 1973 during a storm the Sail Training Ship 'Tectona' operated by the School of Maritime Studies, Plymouth (now a part of Plymouth University) broke loose from her stern moorings at Turnchapel in the Cattewater, the eastern extension of Plymouth Sound. She swung around on her bow moorings and collided with the stern of 'Wavelet', a Cutter of about 30 feet, built probably during the 1920's, and owned by the same family for many years. As a result of the collision most of her counter stern was broken away and the resultant ingress of water caused 'Wavelet' to sink with her masthead showing above the water at half-tide. As soon as conditions allowed the owner rowed out and attached a broom to the masthead which marked the position when the mast was submerged at high water.

'Tectona' was, and still is, is a Gaff Ketch built of teak at Calicut (now Kozhikode) in Kerala, on the south-west coast of India, as a private yacht in 1928. She is 64 feet long with a beam of 18 feet and draws about 6 feet. She was involved in Admiralty work in the Second World War and afterwards was performed Charter work. She served as Sail Training vessel for the School of Maritime Studies from 1964 to 1980. Her Master at the time was Mel Bowen, a Master Mariner who was a lecturer at the School of Maritime Studies, doing his 'turn' of a year's stint on the 'Tectona', which he thoroughly enjoyed. Mel later emigrated to join a Nautical College in New Zealand. After serving the School of Maritime Studies well for sixteen years 'Tectona' was sold to a French owner and then a Swiss charity, based in Barcelona. In 2007 she was purchased by her present owners Sailing Tectona CIC and is still sailing, offering sailing voyages to young people and others with recovery or mental health issues. She is a testament to her builders, and to Teak as a shipbuilding material!

Mel Bowen was also Chairman of the Plymouth Sound Branch (No. 164) of the British Sub-Aqua Club, of which I was also a



member. Mel soon contacted myself and another member Robin Grady, who shortly thereafter became a Diving Instructor at Fort Bovisand Underwater Centre in Plymouth Sound and later a professional diver on oil rigs; to assist him in a possible salvage attempt on Wavelet. If successful this would save the College, or its insurers; the cost, and perhaps delay, of a professional salvage.

So, on the next Saturday morning, the first free day (Robin and I worked during the week – for the same company as it happens. Mel of course was already 'at work') we gathered at the School of Maritime Studies shore establishment building at Queen Anne's Battery with our personal diving equipment, having collected some spare air bottles to take with us from the club's compressor room in case they were needed; and boarded the School of Maritime Studies launch which was towing a couple of old metal lifeboats which we thought might be useful as 'Camels' to lift 'Wavelet' if that should prove necessary, they also contained various lengths of rope which might be useful in the salvage attempt.

Once aboard 'Tectona' we donned wetsuits: diving equipment was a bit more primitive in those days; my wetsuit was home-made from a brown paper pattern, a sheet of black neoprene, a roll of blue rubber tape for the seams, and a tube of Evo-Stik. Robin and I then fitted Aqualung equipment and finned across to the mast of 'Wavelet', still topped by the broom. We descended the mast, visibility was about six feet and 'Wavelet' soon appeared. She was sat upright partially immersed in the mud bottom, more or less to her waterline. Apart from her missing counter there was no other apparent damage, her sail cover still covered her mainsail and boom, and she looked as she would have done on the surface, quite a bizarre sight! We surfaced and reported the situation to Mel who decided to attempt to lift her using 'Tectona's windlass. Mel joined us and the three of us descended again taking a length of rope which after some considerable effort we managed to work either side under the bow and back as far as we could and then joined the ends together abaft the mast over the boom and sailcoat to form a sling. We then surfaced to collect another rope which we found easier to work under the stern and join in the same way to make the two slings necessary to attempt the lift.

During the course of this lengthy dive I did something that I had never done before, I deliberately drained an air bottle completely empty! I knew what was happening and continued working as long as I could. We were at no great depth, I logged maximum





depth as 13 metres and working on the slings above the boom we were at considerably less depth than that. (1973 was our first year of logging dives in metres, previously all dives were logged in feet, but however we still referred to visibility in feet!) In those days I did not use a pressure gauge to judge my remaining air. I had a 'twin set', two 50 cubic feet cylinders joined by a manifold and with a valve at the top of each bottle. Commencing a dive I would open the left hand bottle and keep the right hand one closed. When air got 'tight' I would open the valve on the right hand bottle, easy to reach behind my neck, and 'decant' air until the pressure equalised when I would close the right valve again knowing that there was 25 cu. ft. in each bottle. When the air grew 'tight' again I would repeat the process knowing that there was still 12 ½ cu. ft. in each bottle. When the air grew 'tight' this time I finally decanted once more and left the valve open, it was time to go! This dive I waited until the air finally gave out. I signalled to my companions and finned gently towards the surface, breathing out all the way to avoid lung damage, I was even able to try another breath and got half a breath out of the bottle as the pressure diminished near the surface. Back on board 'Tectona' I changed my demand valve to another bottle and returned to resume the struggle with the slings.

In the meantime the permanent Mate/Bosun of the 'Tectona' had hung off the anchor to free the anchor chain for the lift and when we returned after having rove the slings he assured us that the 'Tectona's windlass "Would lift anything!" At low water slack Mel manoeuvred the bows over the 'Wavelet' and lowered the anchor chain. Robin and I descended one last time to shackle the chain to the two slings and returned on deck to see if the windlass really could "lift anything", in this case 'Wavelet'. The Mate engaged the windlass drive – nothing, 'Wavelet' remained captured by the suction of the mud which gripped her. We then unshipped the mainsheet, a powerful sixfold purchase. This we clapped onto the anchor chain and with a number of brawny cadets on board to assist as required we all tailed onto the purchase, at the same time trying the windlass again. Still nothing! It was coming to the end of the day and as a last resort we could leave the incoming tide to lift her out of the mud, but a before calling it a day a final effort was made to clap a fourfold purchase (it may have been the mizzen sheet) onto the tail of the mainsheet, luff-on-luff. With this and all hands busting a gut, the mud at last relinquished its hold on 'Wavelet'. Once she was free the windlass was indeed able to lift her under 'Tectona's bow until the boom was just under the surface. The plan then was to deposit 'Wavelet' on a nearby beach at high water and let her dry out, and hand her back to the owner to bail her out and float off with the next incoming tide. High water was in the middle of the night so we left 'Tectona' on her moorings with 'Wavelet' hanging under her bows and with her mast sticking up beside 'Tectona's bowsprit to amaze those passing by!

The next morning I launched my own boat, 'Salamander' a 17 ½ foot cold-moulded veneer 'Cabin Cruiser' by Tremlett's of Exmouth



(I visited them once, they were manufacturing in Fibreglass by then but the moulds for the wooden moulded hulls were outside in a field with grass growing through them!). The Tremlett moulded hull was a round bilge planing hull; not a contradiction in terms, as, with substantial Spray Rails on the turn of the bilge and my Homelite 'Bearcat' 55 Horse four-stroke outboard (effectively a Hillman Imp engine on-end and probably the first four-stroke outboard in existence. Homelite also made the 85 Horse 'TigerCat' with a Coventry Climax engine), she would go 'like the clappers'. 20 knots plus with my family on board and 25 knots plus with me solo. I proceeded to Turnchapel at a more appropriate speed about an hour before High Water and watched in admiration as Mel let go the moorings and manoeuvred 'Tectona' with 'Wavelet' suspended under her bow around trots of boats on head-and-stern moorings, including some tight turns where I was able to give a pluck in the right direction. Eventually we were able to deposit 'Wavelet' on a beach close to a jetty to which a line from the masthead was secured. Another line was led in the opposite direction to a strong point on shore to hold her upright as the tide receded. We then departed leaving 'Wavelet' in the care of her owner, who temporarily nailed canvas over the hole in her stern, bailed her out; and as she floated with the flood gently towed her to a boatyard for drying out, cleaning, repair and refurbishment.

The owner was very grateful for the speedy recovery of his beloved family yacht. He admitted that the counter was in a 'delicate' state. ("Rotten as a pear" Mel said) He said that last time it had been painted inside was when he was a child and small enough to crawl inside with a pot of paint and a brush, one wonders how much he got on the boat and how much on himself!

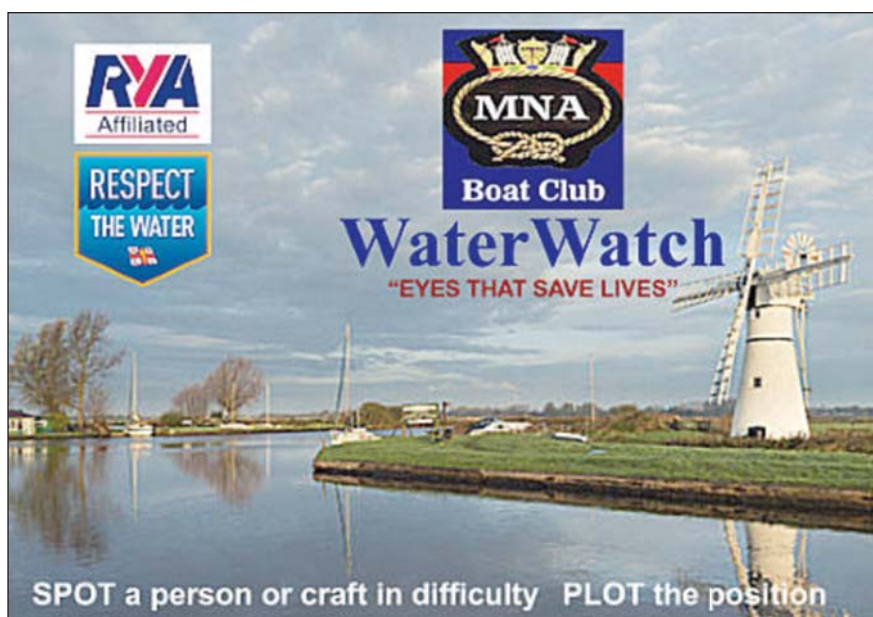
A postscript to the saga occurred at work the following week when a work colleague of mine who lived at Turnchapel said he had found a chunk of wood with two brass fairleads attached, on a slipway near his home. I was thus able to reunite 'Wavelet' with her missing fittings. I am not sure that my colleague was best pleased though, I think he was planning to sell them to a scrap merchant – or am I thinking like a diver?

As a footnote I wonder how many of our MNA members trained at Plymouth and remember 'Tectona'? If you do why not drop a 'Letter to the Editor' with you reminiscences, or even better, write an article for 'Full Ahead'. I have enjoyed remembering the episode and old friends, and writing this epistle.

## Key dates

- **1928**  
Built by Calicut Shipyard, India
- **1939/1945**  
Admiralty work, Second World War
- **1964/80**  
Owned by Plymouth University
- **1980/88**  
Private ownership (French)
- **1988/2007**  
Owned by Swiss Charity, based in Barcelona
- **2007**  
Bought by present owners

## The MNA Boat Club's WaterWatch Initiative "Eyes That Save Lives"



Some ten years ago the MNA Boat Club launched a maritime safety & surveillance scheme whereby members undertook to act as "watchkeepers afloat" to "Spot, Plot, Report and Record" any incidents, potential incidents or hazards whenever they took their boats out thereby acting in a very similar manner to that undertaken by the National Coastwatch Institution's (NCI) watchkeepers working ashore from their look-outs around the coast. Known as "SeaVue" the scheme had the support of the MCA and the RNLI but it operated almost exclusively only around the coastal waters of the UK and hardly extended inland at all,

Around the same time the RNLI launched their "Respect the Water" campaign to reduce the number (circa 200+) of accidental drownings around the coast of the UK by 50% by 2024 but once again the emphasis was on "the coast" where the RNLI maintains Lifeboat Stations rather than on inland waterways where some 70% of accidental drownings actually occur!

So three years ago the MNA Boat Club (MNABC) established an "operational partnership" with the RNLI for MNABC members to promote the Respect the Water campaign and extend the coverage of that initiative to include inland waterways, and at the same time the MNABC changed the name of their scheme from SeaVue to the now more appropriate title of "WaterWatch".

Although an integral part of the Merchant Navy Association national charity with its 2,000 plus members, The MNA Boat Club is a relatively small organisation with only some 220 members so the idea that Club members alone could provide a nationwide surveillance service was essentially unrealistic and it was therefore agreed that we would start by operating a "pilot scheme" in just one of our Boat Club regions, namely East Anglia where we already enjoyed a very good relationship as an "Affiliated Club member of the Norfolk & Suffolk Boating Association (NSBA)

So we approached the NSBA to see if they might be interested in some kind of collaboration with the MNA Boat Club to promote the WaterWatch Scheme in East Anglia, and in particular on The Broads, and to our delight they responded to that idea enthusiastically with the suggestion of a "partnership" between the MNABC and the NSBA to promote and operate WaterWatch on The Broads; this is now firmly established with a representative of the NSBA co-opted as a flag officer of the MNA Boat Club and a representative of the MNA Boat Club now as an elected member of the NSBA General Purposes committee.

### MNABC/NSBA Partnership Arrangement

Members of the MNA Boat Club and individual members of the NSBA who participate in the scheme are known as "WaterWatch Crew Members". They are briefed to act as the "eyes and ears" for

the emergency services and the Broads Authority whenever they take to the water to:

#### SPOT

any craft or persons in difficulty, or any actual or potential hazards

#### PLOT

the relevant position •

#### REPORT

the facts to HM Coastguard and/or the Broads Authority •

#### RECORD

the incident by completing a WaterWatch Incident Report Form

Which is sent both to the Boat Club and to the NSBA in order to enable them both to monitor incidents and hazards and follow up developments and corrective actions.

### The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF)

In March 2021 the MNA Boat Club's WaterWatch Scheme became a member of the National Water Safety Forum which is a UK-focused, voluntary network, working together in order to reduce water-related deaths and associated harm.

The NWSF was established in 2004 following a Government review into water safety. It sought to bring together a number of pre-existing national groups with the ambition of creating a 'one-stop shop' for the prevention of drowning and water safety harm in the UK, recognising the broad range of existing stakeholder groups, their respective contributions, and their own brands and values, often towards charitable objectives. Members include the MCA, RNLI, RLSS, The Broads Authority, the Environment Agency etc. etc.,

### Beyond our "pilot scheme" on The Broads

The success of our joint venture with the NSBA now begs the question "could we expand our WaterWatch initiative to more inland waterways through collaboration with other potential partners?"

So if any boating associations, owners clubs or other interested boating organisations around the UK believe that this initiative by the MNA Boat Club may deserve your organisation's support as a potential partner I'd be delighted to hear from you!

Yours Aye

**Clive Edwards**, Commodore, Merchant Navy Association Boat Club – email [commodore@seafarersafloat.com](mailto:commodore@seafarersafloat.com) Tel 01305 781725



## Merchant Navy Association Boat Club

### Annual General Meeting

The AGM will be held at The Water's Edge, Bramerton, Norwich NR14 7ED starting at 11.30 hours. After the meeting and a short "open forum", there will be a talk by Chris Crowther, author of several bestselling mystery stories set on the Norfolk Broads featuring the fictitious Broads Authority Ranger, Jack Fellows.

If any MNABC member has not received the AGM information sent out by email and post, please contact MNABC Secretary, Tim Brant:

Tel: 01733 205001/07948 393934

Email: [events@mna.org.uk](mailto:events@mna.org.uk)

## Nautical Quiz Winners Announced

Congratulations to the following winners of the quiz in the 2021 Summer edition of "Full Ahead" for "One 4 All" multi-store vouchers:

**1st Prize (£30) – Doug May.**

**2nd Prize (£20) – Monica Spencer.**

**3rd Prize (£10) – Geoff Hartsgrrove.**

Congratulations

**Tim Brant**

## MNA Slop Chest Prices (2021)

Please note: All prices now include postage and Packaging

CODE	ITEM	INC. UK P&P	INC. OVERSEAS P&P
<b>CLOTH BADGES AND CLOTHING</b>			
201	MNA Blazer Badge	£13.50	£15.50
202	MN Blazer Badge	£13.50	£15.50
203	MNA Blazer Badge with Red & Blue ensigns	£13.50	£15.50
204	Russian Convoy Club Blazer Badge	£13.50	£15.50
205	Russian Convoy Beret Badge	£11.50	£13.50
206	MN Officers Beret Badge	£11.50	£13.50
207	MN Beret Badge	£11.50	£13.50
208	MNA Beret Badge	£11.50	£13.50
301	MN Large Brass Raised Blazer Button	£2.50	£4.50
302	MN Small Brass Raised Blazer Button	£2.00	£4.00
303	MNA Tie	£13.50	£15.50
304	MNA Tie Clip-On	£13.50	£15.50
306	MN Tie	£13.50	£15.50
311	MN Veterans Tie – Veteran Badge holders only	£13.50	£15.50
308	Beret White for Artic Convoys Sizes: 58 59 60	£13.75	£15.75
309	Beret Black Sizes: 58 59 60	£13.75	£15.75
310	Breton Style Cap Black Sizes: Sm Med Lge	£17.50	£19.50
312	Baseball Cap – MNA Embroidered Badge	£12.50	£14.50
313	Baseball Cap – Red Ensign Embroidered Badge	£12.50	£14.50
315	MN Silk Lined & Fringed Scarf in MN Colours	£17.50	£19.50
316	MNA Red Fringed Microfleece Scarf	£15.25	£17.25
<b>MNA BOAT CLUB ITEMS</b>			
318	MNABC Blazer Badge (Embroidered)	£9.00	£11.00
319	MNABC Baseball Cap – with Embroidered Badge	£12.50	£14.50
320	MNABC Boat Burgee, 45x30cm Hand Sewn, Roped etc.	£49.50	£52.50
321	MNABC Boat Burgee 45x30cm double sided printed	£29.50	£31.50
608	MNABC Lapel Badge – Enamel	£6.00	£8.00
<b>MICELLANEOUS</b>			
501	MN Enamel Cufflinks	£13.50	£15.50
502	MN Cufflinks Silvertone	£13.50	£15.50
503	MN Tie Clip Enamel	£9.50	£11.50
504	MN Tie Clip Silvertone	£9.50	£11.50
505	Red Ensign Tie Clip	£9.50	£11.50
506	Red Ensign Cufflinks	£13.50	£15.50
508	MN Ladies Sweetheart Brooch – Enamel	£11.50	£13.50

CODE	ITEM	INC. UK P&P	INC. OVERSEAS P&P
509	MN Stainless Steel 6oz Hip Flask	£15.00	£17.00
510	MN Teaspoon – Silvertone	£6.50	£8.50
514	MN Wall Plaque	£29.00	£32.00
515	MN Zippo Style Stainless Steel Lighter	£13.50	£15.50
517	Great British Merchant Navy Teddy Bear 6"	£6.50	£8.50
519	Red Ensign Fridge Magnet	£3.50	£5.50
522	MN Bottle Opener Key Ring – Stainless Steel	£6.50	£8.50
523	MN Stainless Steel Key Ring	£6.00	£8.50
524	MN Trolley Token/Key Ring	£3.00	£5.00
526	MNA new member gift Pack – Tie, Lapel Badge and Red Ensign Lapel Badge	£18.50	£20.50
527	MN Remembrance Gift Pack – MN Tie, MN Poppy Pin Badge	£17.50	£19.50
528	MN Formal Wear Gift Pack – MN Cummerbund and Bow Tie	£19.50	£21.50
<b>LAPEL BADGES</b>			
601	MN Metal Beret Badge – Pin or Clip	£7.50	£9.50
603	MN Filligree Silvertone Lapel Badge	£6.50	£8.50
604	MN Lapel Badge Enamel	£6.00	£8.00
607	MNA Lapel Badge Enamel	£6.00	£8.00
609	Red Ensign Lapel Badge	£6.00	£8.00
611	Blue Ensign Lapel Badge	£6.00	£8.00
612	MN Poppy Pin Badge	£11.50	£13.50
613	Red Ensign Poppy Pin Badge	£11.50	£13.50
615	Poppy Pendant & Silvertone 18" Chain	£6.50	£8.50

### CLEARANCE ITEMS!

507	MN Silvertone Stick Pin Was £9.50, NOW £4.75
606	MN Awareness Lapel Badge Was £6.00, NOW £2.75
614	MN Women at Sea Poppy Brooch Was £6.50, NOW £3.75
528	MNA 30 Double Sided Comm. Coin Was £6.25, NOW £3.25
529	MNA 30 Lapel Badge Was £5.00, NOW £1.75

### MNA SUPPLY OFFICER

Sandra Broom

Email: [shop@mna.org.uk](mailto:shop@mna.org.uk) Tel: 0121 2440190

Please send cheques and postal orders, made payable to Merchant Navy Association to:

3 Keats Grove, Acocks Green, Birmingham. B27 7QS.

Please include list of items required and address to be posted to.

OR

For card payments Tel: 0121 2440190

# Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The piece in the latest Pulse regarding the diver swallowed by a whale reminded me of an advertisement seen in the London Underground back in the Fifties.

Inside the trains, running along the strip above the heads of the seated, and directly opposite the eyes of the standing passengers was a series of slots ideal for some simple advertising matter. This one related to a promotion by the Wool Marketing Board with a slogan – "There Is No Substitute For Wool".

The coloured sketch showed an elderly bearded gent, clad in a dressing gown, seated in a deckchair in the open mouth of a whale.

The verse accompanying read: -

**When Jonah, deep inside the whale,  
Seemed cheerful, hearty, even hale,  
The whale said, visibly annoyed,  
But aren't you cold in that dank void ?**

Dear Sandra,

I thought our readers might be interested in a ceremony I attended in company with the family of a Survivor held on Sunday June 27th. to remember the Lancastria.

We formed up on the riverside by the plaque commemorating the ship opposite the old Cunard building.

The ceremony was described as a "scaled back" event, however, The Lord Lieutenant & High Sheriff For Merseyside and the Mayor of Liverpool were in attendance & laid wreaths at the Memorial. A brief service was taken by the Revd Canon Dr. Crispin Paulin, Vicar of Liverpool Parish Church, which, I discovered had been badly damaged during the Liverpool blitz. The last post & Reveille were played beautifully and as the bugler finished a Hurricane of the Battle of Britain Memorial flew down the river round, & back up the river dipping her wing tips in tribute as she went.

Because of Government constrictions, a Service of Choral Evensong was held in the parish Church at 18:30, Evensong is a beautiful service if done properly & this was done properly! The standards of the MN. & St. Nazaire were in Church.

It was envisaged Mr. Angus Struthers, a Vice President of Cunard would attend, however, again, this was not possible but in a written address he said "Service to the nation in time of need is embedded in Cunards 181 year

**Said Jonah, with a careless shrug,**

**"My woolly gown keeps me quite snug".**

**The whale, impressed, told all his school,**

**"There is no substitute for wool."**

This all popped out of my subconscious after 65 years.

Yrs ever,

**David Green**

Dear Sandra

I have just read the latest edition of "Full Ahead", always an interesting read, thank you for your work in producing the magazine.

You mention lack of letters, so I thought it may be of interest to some readers to hear some further information about the loss of "The Empress of Ireland".

My son lives in Canada and during one trip to Toronto I visited the Mount Pleasant cemetery. Just inside the gates I saw a large

sculpted memorial surrounded by small plaques in the grass, it was obviously of maritime interest, so I went closer to view it. The names on many of the plaques referred to Captain ..., and I wondered how many Captains can a ship have?

On returning to my son's house, he told me that there was little knowledge of the event as it was so close to the time of the loss of "Titanic". On looking at the statistics we saw that 1,012 people lost their lives, 134 of them children, and the many "Captains" referred to Salvation Army titles as 170 personnel were on board, en route to a S.A. conference in London. Many other victims lie in Rimouski, Quebec as mentioned in your article.

The professionalism of Ferguson and Bamford is well noted in the excellent article, it inspires me to visit the memorial again, when Covid conditions permit.

Thank you  
**Carol Bilney**  
Kingston upon Thames, Surrey

timeliness. The company suffered many losses during World War 2 & other conflicts but none claimed as many lives as the Lancastria. "In conclusion he stated, "It is fitting to gather once again in Cunards Spiritual home of Liverpool to remember the sacrifice of so many lost on Lancastria. She will never be forgotten.

**Roger Round**

Boston and Lincolnshire MNA Branch Secretary & last Chairman of the HMT. Lancastria Association .





**Dear All**

**Re: National Merchant Navy Day - 2021.**

Sadly for the second year running our annual Merchant Navy Day parades have been cancelled, as have all other services parades, and we hope to return in 2022. This year, 2021, would have been our coming of age parade as it was 21 years ago that the then Government decreed that September 3rd; would forever be known as National Merchant Navy Day. The reason for this is that on that day in 1939 the British liner "ATHENIA" was torpedoed by a German "U" boat and sunk with the loss of 118 lives, both crew and passengers. This action was the UK's first casualties of WW2 and resulted in it being brought before the Nuremberg War Trials at war's end. Our Merchant Navy and merchant seafarers have

supported the Armed Forces in war and peace for over 150 years without which our forces could not have fought a war. Merchant ships and merchant seafarers were at all wars including Normandy and the Falklands where we also lost ships and seafarers and without the Merchant Navy this country would not have survived. Even today few realise that every commodity, food and goods we use so freely enter by merchant ships and merchant seafarers. In WW2 we lost 2,524 merchant ships, we lost 30,248 merchant seafarers and had 15,081 held as POW's or missing, a larger percentage than the Armed Forces. Our sincere thanks go to the Mayors of Margate, Ramsgate and Birchington for their unfailing support over the years by flying our Red Ensign on September 3rd. May I please request that on September 3rd; that you give a thought to

Your Merchant Navy and say thank you.  
**"We will remember them".**

**Phil Hughes**, (Secretary), Independent Vindicatrix of East Kent Association - M.N.

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We will attend the Battle of Britain Day parade / service at the Battle of Britain Memorial at Capel outside Folkestone on September 15th; along with the "Prince of Wales Sea School" Standard Bearer plus attending the 3-day event at Ramsgate Harbour to Commemorate the day that King George IV bestowed the title of "Royal Harbour" on the town 200 years ago with our Standards. We are looking forward to the day we can return to our Memorial at Tower Hill again.

## Hospital Ships - WWI & II

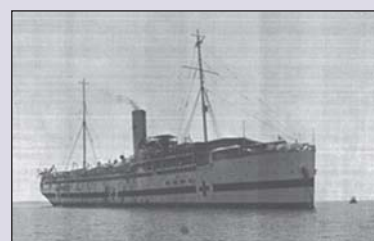
The Army Transport Service operated a total of 24 hospital ships which were manned by Merchant Seamen under the control of the Army Transport Service. The medical staff were Army personnel. The hospital ships were operated under the provisions of the Hague Convention X of 1907 which specified identity markings. These proved inadequate so large red illuminated crosses were added on deck for aerial visibility at night. Hospital ships were allowed to carry medical supplies as cargo for the battlefield. Most of the hospital ships were former passenger liners/troopships which were disarmed, repainted and rearranged for hospital use. Six Liberty ships were converted for hospital use as well.

Hospital ships have been used by the military to evacuate and treat army personnel until they could be transferred to military hospitals and treatment centres. The first recorded hospital ship was The Red Rover in 1860 during the American Civil War. British forces have also used hospital ships to medically or surgically treat members of the British Army, Navy and RAF. Hospital ships were also used for humanitarian operations throughout the world and are often called Mercy ships for this reason. Other names for hospital ships include Navy Ambulances or Floating Ambulances.

Though predominantly staffed by members of QARNNS and QARNNS(R), the Queen Alexandra's Nursing Service and the Reserves members of the QAIMNS have nursed aboard hospital ships alongside their navy comrades. As part of their role aboard hospital ships QAs had to learn lifeboat drills in case their ship was sunk, damaged or hit a mine. This included learning to row the large lifeboats so that they could do this competently during any evacuation. Most QAs wore bathing costumes under their ward dresses and uniforms whilst aboard the hospital ships. Whilst on these ships nursing and medical personnel would wear their lifebelts, only taking them off when they were asleep. Nurses also had to learn survival tips for evacuating their patients when abandoning ship during a bombing or torpedo attack. For example a patient who had a wooden leg splint would have to have it removed before evacuation because should he go into the water the wood of the leg brace would float and cause his upper body and head to go under water and could make him drown.

To prevent bombing or being fired upon by planes, boats or submarines hospital ships are painted all white with red crosses on each side. There is usually an illuminated red cross on the deck which affords the ship, the patients and, medical personnel and the ship's crew protection under the Geneva Convention. Unfortunately this did not save the Australian hospital ship Centaur during WWI when it was sunk by the Japanese on 14th July 1943. There were other ships sunk as well during the period of both wars. Many of these hospital

ships were also painted grey so that enemy ships, planes and U-boats could not tell them apart from merchant ships in an attempt to stop them from being targeted. Usually hospital ships are stripped of any weaponry or war supplies though the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship RFA Argus, an aviation training ship, did have armaments and when acting as a medical facility it was designated as a primary medical receiving ship.



During the Second World War hospital ships continued to serve the British Army in evacuating the wounded and injured back to Britain. The number of hospital ships was supplemented by hospital carriers which had a shallow draught and could go close in shore to facilitate the swifter evacuation of casualties. They were assisted by water ambulances with flat bottoms that could go ashore and carry stretchers. Once again members of the QAIMNS nursed aboard these floating hospitals and again faced the dangers of war. For example when the hospital ship Maid of Kent and HS Brighton were being loaded with patients they were bombed by enemy Stuka planes.

International Law of the Geneva Convention ruled that hospital ships had to display electrically powered lights to illuminate their red cross signs on the sides of the ships and on the deck. Hospital ships were painted all white with a broad green stripe around the hull and the crosses on the side to make them easily identifiable by U-boats, warships and enemy ships. This should have given enemy pilots and gunners far off recognition that this was not a legitimate target and was not to be fired upon. Sadly the reality was that they provided an easy target.

### Names of WWI hospital ships

HS Tarai, HS St. David, HS Llandoverly Castle, HS Aba, HMHS Amarapoora, HS Vita, HS Oxfordshire, HS Ophir, HS Telemba, HS Amsterdam, HS Dorsetshire, HS Empire Clyde, HS Vasna, HS The Isle of Jersey, HS The Duke of Lancaster, HMHS Tairea, HS The Duke of Rothesay and HS St. Andrew.

### Mercy Ships

Hospital ships are still in use today by the charity mercy ships in third world and war torn countries like Africa and nations like Liberia and Sierra Leone performing life saving surgery and operations to save or improve eye sight, deformities or relieve pain or illnesses. They provide an invaluable service to the world.

**Percival Smith, MN, 1257**

## News from the Branches

Many branches have either not met or met by Zoom but hopefully by the next edition branches will be flourishing again and fighting for space to tell us their news, we look forward to hearing from you.

### North Wales (New)

After many frustrating months of complying with Corona Virus restrictions the new North Wales branch of the Merchant Navy Association held its first meeting on Wednesday 7th July 2021 at the Cae Mor Hotel on the promenade at Llandudno.

We congregated 13:30 for lunch at 14:00 with plenty of succulent choices for both main course and sweet then moved on to formally opening our local association.

The group of twelve were largely unknown to each other but, as seafarers do, we quickly relaxed in our collective company and were exchanging reminiscences before we got anywhere near the luncheon table. The meal ensured that any remaining inhibitions melted away and all of us were in good form ready for the more formal part of our inauguration.

Up until this point all contact was largely directed through the founder in the forms of emails, letters, telephone calls and 'WhatsApp' bulletins, the latter of which has provided an easy and effective Billboard to keep us all informed.

In addition to the members who were present another six members sent 'Apologies for Absence' due to health, vacation and a punctured tyre gained, rather expensively, on his way to the meeting causing him the need to divert and get the offending item sorted. All in all, it was a healthy response to our labours over the last eighteen months and hopefully bodes well for the future.

For future meetings we have decided on the second Wednesday monthly, excepting January when the hotel closes annually for renovation, and have made arrangements with the Cae Mor Hotel for meeting there up to December 2022. We intend to congregate at 12:30 for lunch at 13:00 thence hopefully a less formal session of setting the worlds wrongs to right as seamen do.

We are open to anybody with a maritime interest who may wish to join us, if you are one of those people please contact us by email on mnagc21@yahoo.com or phone on 07971221671 and all will be explained whilst making you welcome. Initially it is members without spouses whilst we learn to walk, thence we hope to break into a trot and expand to include spouses and Next of Kin etc. But at present we have just transgressed from the Crawling stage to Walking – what do they say about catching monkeys!

Our venue raised immediate praise from the members attending from access and parking to meeting room and meal also the staff were first class, so it was little wonder that the Cae Mor was where everybody wanted to be in the future. Being a hotel of course meant

the possibility of accommodation should anybody feel the need for extended retail therapy locally in Llandudno.

We would wish to thank all of you who have helped us along the way from publicity to explaining how the system works in addition to local papers we have had assistance from the MNA administration staff, in particular from Malcolm Mathison and Ian Hodge, also from Darren Miller and others – we thank you all.

**Mike Ridehalgh**

Chairman MNA North Wales ... (good to write that at last!)

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### BLACKPOOL

Branch meetings resumed on the 6th June with the majority of members attending. Sadly since the last report two more of our members have passed away and several more are unlikely to attend the meetings due to ill health. This will be a sad year for the Blackpool branch with the loss of so many members and no one joining to replace them.

**Philip Rogers, Chairman**

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### WEYMOUTH & PORTLAND DISTRICT

Branch members participated in the Armed Forces Weekend events in Weymouth over the weekend of 19/20 June. On the Sunday a Service of Remembrance in the Nothe Fort was well attended by a good number of branch members who were accompanied by the President, Vivian Foster.

Paul Compton has stood down as chairman and is now the secretary. The new chairman is Paul Cooper.

**David Parsons, Branch Member**

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### IMMINGHAM

The branch is still afloat and making steady headway to calmer waters. That is the lifting of restrictions due to this wretched virus. It was hoped to have a meeting face to face at the end of June but that has some prudently put on hold and our now good friend Zoom will host the meeting. We look forward to better times in July. But as always the MN will win through.

**David Knighton, Secretary**

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### Nana Moon's Cafe and Bar, Weymouth

Nana Moon's is the meeting place of the Weymouth, Portland and District Branch every month and is situated in Trinity Street, (near the Harbour Bridge), Weymouth.

It is run by Michelle and Liam Ludlow, both Weymouth, Portland and District Branch Members.

All MNA Members are welcome and you can be assured of a friendly greeting.

Please make yourselves known on arrival if you are in the area.



### BOSTON & SOUTH Lincs

The chairman Roy Glencross vice chairman Chris Wren and Member John Flynn of the Boston & South Lincs MNA in attendance at our local council offices to take part in the raising of the Armed Forces Flag.



# Faraway places with strange sounding names

## Kaimana (New Guinea) continued ...

Working for the drilling/exploration arm of an oil company deployed in the middle of nowhere can be quite a pleasant experience most of the time. There is a lot of pressure on the drilling rig to complete and test each exploration hole as fast as possible and move on to the next location. This autonomous operation was supported by a jack up rig, two work boats, the anchor handling tug supply type and a large cargo vessel that carried all the materials and equipment needed to support the drilling of a minimum of four exploration wells. This meant that the work boats were designed to be jack of all trades and expected to switch from one mode of operation to another with just a few hours' notice.

After towing the rig from the last drilling site in the mouth of the fast flowing Fly River in Papua New Guinea (another story), the rig arrived at its new location approximately ten miles offshore from the town of Kaimana.

At the time we were there it was the South East monsoon (monsoon means wind) with a fairly strong breeze blowing pretty much all of the time, so the rig needed to be lying head to wind with the drilling package at the stern or down wind. This entailed one boat holding the rig on location while the second boat ran out the rig anchors, once safely held in position the rig could jack up its legs and eventually stand free of the water. The anchor handling boats would then retrieve the anchors and run them back to the rig. It was then the job of the boats to go into supply mode and bring all the materials and equipment, needed to drill one well, from the supply ship, which by then had anchored safely in the sheltered bay close to Kaimana.

Lying alongside a jack up rig, in what could be classed as quite rough seas, can be a quite a tricky problem. We solved this by dropping the boat's anchor some way ahead of the rig, dropping astern and picking up a buoy, previously laid and attached to an anchor, and then going alongside and taking ropes from the rig's anchors, which were hanging free over the side. The ropes attached to the rig anchors acted as springs with the weight of the anchors keeping the boat at just the right distance off for the crane to offload the cargo and for the pipes to be connected to transfer cement/oil/water/and barites (drilling mud). This was a fairly tricky operation in daylight but at night time could be a little hairy. The good thing was, being an exploration well, things tended to be a little slower than if it had been a production well where they would have been drilling through a known structure and drill a lot faster and therefore a lot more material is required over a shorter time.

The other good thing was they required quite a lot of fresh water and this meant sitting alongside at Kaimana for days just loading water at one/two tons per hour.

It was while alongside that we used to get visitors, indigenous people from New Guinea, not the Indonesians who had been trans-migrated from Java. They would sit on the jetty and just stare at us for hours. We found out later that most of them would go into the jungle catch crocodiles, skin them, and sell on to the local trader for food and other goods and then disappear back into the jungle. While I was there, I traded with one of the men for a set of bows and arrows and a couple of spears to add to my collection of blow pipes I had obtained from the Ibans of Borneo.

Being tied up at the only jetty supporting Kaimana, all the local trading boats had to lie alongside us when they arrived to discharge and load. It was quite an eye opener to see what was shipped in and out. Although there was an airport, there was only an irregular passenger/freight service supported by the Indonesian government

and used mainly to transfer officials. This meant that pretty much everything needed to support the town came in over this little wooden jetty. Drums of fuel oil to keep the generators working, canned goods, dried goods, especially rice and beans. Some of the small boats just traded along the coast but other larger boats came from further afield using the trade winds to sail from Java and Bali.

One of the other perks of working in this area was that when the rig and supply ship started to run a bit low on fresh food we had to do a supply run to Darwin to pick up a couple of chiller/freezer containers. Darwin was approximately 500 miles to the south so a two day run down, couple of days in port and then two days back.

Darwin could be called a pretty relaxed port as far as we were concerned. Customs and immigration would come aboard, clear the ship, enquire that we had enough alcohol to last the stay, seal the bond and then give me some extra seals just in case I ran short of booze and needed to open up again. They would also book themselves in for lunch as they knew that I had a very good Chinese cook and food was first class - and they also knew how many cases of beer were available.

I had to do a leave transfer out through Darwin just before Christmas and the only flight the agent could arrange to get me on was first class British Airways. The flight was due mid-afternoon and the agent said it was delayed, but don't worry, we are having a BBQ and you can come and join us. The party consisted of the Agent, Customs, Immigration, Port Health, and a few more government officials. As the afternoon progressed the flight was delayed more and more and the beers went down more and more. At about 11.00 pm we were advised that the flight was coming and so everyone decided that as it was Christmas, they would come to the airport to say goodbye. As most of the people were government officials my passport was stamped in the car and we by-passed all the usual check ins etc. and went straight to the plane. It turned out there was only one passenger boarding, ME and everyone lined up to shake hands and say goodbye. I was never sure who the crew thought I was but I was met and saluted by a line of flight attendants at the top of the first class entrance, led to my seat, given a glass of champagne and we took off. The next thing I was aware of was arriving in Singapore and I missed possibly the best flight of my life. But I did get home for Christmas arriving on December 24th.

**To be continued.**

**Geoff Francis**



# Branch in the Spotlight

## Bristol & District Branch



Bristol branch was founded in 1996 in The Missions to Seafarers Centre, Gloucester Road, Avonmouth under the chairmanship of Harry Higgins. After a few years, it moved to the Railway Club at Temple Meads Station which is when I joined the association. I well remember going down the steps into the underworld to the club room below. In those days, it was a smoke filled rather depressing place to hold a meeting with its own particular aroma that none of us have ever forgotten! However, the craic was good, drinks were reasonably priced and there was much lamp swinging in addition to the business. At that time, we had some great characters in our midst, plenty with war service but, sadly, many have crossed the bar since those heady days.

On 6th December 1999, we took over the tenancy of the Bristol Council owned No 1 Dock Cottages, a small two up, two down, Grade 2 listed ex-dock worker's cottage beside the water at Cumberland Basin – conveniently situated between two pubs! Over the years, a huge amount of work has taken place there, to make it shipshape and Bristol fashion. As it's an old cottage with no damp course and beside the water, work is intermittently ongoing to keep it dry. It houses a library, our committee room and a small museum with many artefacts, model ships, pictures, medals etc donated by not only our own members but members and their families from all over the country. Maybe there will be another article on the cottage and its museum at some time. Meanwhile, we open the cottage to the public at various times during the year and branches are welcome to visit it with prior notice.

In those early days, our branch achieved a lot. Our splendid monument near Bristol Bridge is a testament to the hard work and many hours of fundraising by the early members from 1997 when the appeal was launched to achieve this lasting memorial to

the many seamen who have sailed from the great city of Bristol. We were honoured to have it unveiled on 21st May 2001 by HRH The Princess Royal and dedicated by the Dean of Bristol. By then Harry Higgins had stood down as Chairman and was replaced by Derek Tedder. There is a booklet giving a full account of the efforts and people involved in the project entitled The Bristol Merchant Navy Memorial, Welsh Back, Bristol.

2002 brought another change of leader with Captain Hamish Grant becoming the Chairman and Derek Tedder our President until he crossed the bar when Hamish took over the role in 2012, the position he still holds.

The next project was to get a stained glass window erected in St Stephen's Church, known as the Harbour Church as it was originally on the quayside although the River Frome was covered over long ago for traffic to take priority over shipping. The window was unveiled and dedicated to all merchant seamen on 9th May 2004. A Book of Remembrance was there too, recording the individual names of those members of the Merchant Navy who lost their lives in WWI and 2 but this is now in the reception area of the Bristol Council House on College Green where it is possible to see it, and other Merchant Navy artefacts during normal working hours.

On 4th May 2005, the branch was honoured by being granted the Freedom of the City of Bristol so we have the right to march from the city centre to the Bristol Council House.

By 2009 we were on the fundraising trail again, this time for a plaque at the memorial listing all the ships lost in WWI and 2 that had set sail from Bristol. Michael Fleming became Chairman in May 2010 and The Lost Ships plaque was dedicated on 28th November 2010.

With the Railway Club closing down for the site to be redeveloped, June 2010 saw us leave the centre of Bristol to move our branch meetings to our present home at the RBL Club, Whitchurch and Pensford branch. A much more salubrious setting and

where we have always been made very welcome. In the previous year, while at the Railway Club, we had tried some day time meetings and in November 2010 we switched to day time meetings permanently.

In 2012, I became Chairman and am currently still in post. There was then a lull until more fundraising saw another plaque unveiled on 5th February 2017 at the memorial, this time to The Lost Boys of 1939 – 1945, all sadly aged 16 or under. This was filmed by the BBC and shown later on Inside Out West.

In May this year we reached our 25th Anniversary but circumstances at the time prevented us having any celebration for it. We hope that we will be able to do a belated celebration for our members next year and the other social occasions that have been missing like barbeques at the cottage and our Christmas dinner. It will also be good to get back to services such as for Merchant Navy Day, plaque dedications at our memorial and 11th November services at our memorial after the main one at the Bristol Cenotaph.

Like other branches, and many associations with an ageing membership, in recent times we have lost members either by them crossing the bar or finding attending meetings too much for them. The membership is getting older so our numbers are gradually going down and it's becoming increasingly difficult to find members willing to take on the positions necessary to run a branch. However, our existing members are happy to be back at branch meetings and coffee mornings at the cottage since we have been allowed to open up with few restrictions. We can but hope that this continues.

**Doug May**







## Remembering Shipmates

**Alexandra (Sandie) Hern**

**4/9/1946 – 6/8/2021**



Sandie joined the association in 2011 with her husband Doug. She became Branch secretary in 2012 following a branch reshuffle and held that post for four years doing an excellent job. She stepped down to become Vice Chairperson for the BNVTA (British Nuclear Veteran Test Association) as her husband had served on Christmas Island during the nuclear explosions.

She had served in the army in Cypress and Egypt only leaving to have a family.

She became a PA for a shipping magnate and had to live in Singapore for many years.

She will be sadly missed by all members of the branch.

Roy Glencross, Branch Chairperson, Boston and South Lincs.

### **Bernard “Bunnie” Reginald William Barker**

**Feb 1941 – Aug 2021**



It is with regret that I must advise you that Bernard aka Bunnie has ‘Crossed the Bar’ while in Ipswich Hospital. He had not been well for some time. Bunnie leaves a wife Daphne, Step Daughter and two Step Son’s plus grandchildren.

Bunnie’s career in the Merchant Navy started in 26/07/1956 as a Galley Boy. Bunnie left the Merchant Navy as a Head Chef in 13/01/1990. His first company was British Transport Commission Eastern Region Vessels and then onto S.S Kenya Castle London October 57, M.V. Bloemfontein Castle London Oct 58. Rangitane London May 60- April 61. British Transport Commission Eastern Region Vessels August 61-63 as Assistant cook. British Railway Board March 63 – September 68. S.S Avalon Harwich 68. British Railway Board Eastern Region 68-oct76. Sea Freightliner Harwich October 76. M.V. Cambridge Ferry 1976 October. British Railway Board Eastern Region May 77. M.V. Cambridge Ferry June 1977. Norfolk Ferry Harwich June 77. British Railway Board Eastern Region 1977. Sea Freightliner 1977. Suffolk Ferry Feb 78. Sea Freightliner 78. British Railway Board Eastern Region 78- Dec 78. Finally ending with Sealink liner December 1978 – 1990, in which time Bunnie became Chief Cook on 7/11/82. Bunnies Merchant Navy career ended 1990 after being diagnosed diabetes type one.

### **Frederick Charles Taylor**

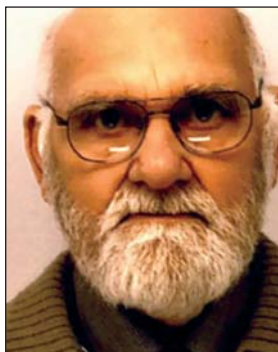
**1934-2021**

Frederick, Rick or Ricky Taylor passed away in Yeovil District Hospital on Thursday 17th June after a long battle with illness. Originally from Smethwick in the Midlands, he and his wife, Meg, moved from London to Wells in 1971 and had been long-term residents of Keward ever since. After National Service in the Royal Engineers' Bomb Disposal squad, his career in the Merchant Navy, mainly with BP, was truly international and took him to all 4 corners of the world. He rose to be the Chief Engineer on oil supertankers with BP throughout the 1970s and 1980s, ending his sea-faring career with Rowbothams and retiring on medical grounds. Latterly, he worked as site engineer at Wells Cathedral School & regularly supported Railwells and spent many years travelling the United States in the camper van between October and March each winter. An incredibly active & intelligent man, Fred was at various times a champion ballroom dancer, cyclist, glider, swimmer, TA reservist, artist and active supporter of the Royal British Legion, Royal Engineers and Merchant Navy Association. His final journey will be mourned by his children, Susan, Stephen, David and Lisa as well as neighbours and friends and shipmates the world over.

Lisa Pool, daughter

Taunton Branch Added: He was a longstanding member of Taunton and District Branch and was their standard bearer for many years. He carried the standard at many parades all over the country and was a regular at the Cenotaph, Tower Hill and the Royal Albert Hall.

Although mourners at his funeral were restricted by Covid regulations two members of the branch were in attendance. The branch felt that he always did them proud.



### **Michael Fleming**

**1943 – 2021**

To write an obituary for Michael is not an easy task as he was a very private person. At his own request, he had a private cremation with no funeral and no fuss. Everyone in the branch knew and respected him, and some further afield from when he represented the branch on the National committee, but few really knew him well as he showed different sides of himself to different people.

Michael was a fount of knowledge and information with the memory of an elephant remembering all the members past, including their widows, and present. He served the branch in a number of roles including fund raiser for our memorial, Membership Secretary, Vice-Chairman, Chairman and Vice-President. However, what many will remember him for is the production of the branch newsletter, Shipshape and Bristol Fashion, printed

## Remembering Shipmates ... continued



for many years without a break with his wife Pauline. Michael was devastated to lose Pauline in 2019 but continued to produce the newsletter for as long as he could.

After the Merchant Navy, he spent many years driving Bristol buses and received an award from the Bristol Evening Post for setting up the 11th November remembrance services at the Lawrence Hill bus depot to honour the drivers, conductors and passengers who died in WW2. These continued every year until the pandemic. A vintage bus was used, Philip Auden took the services from it, wreaths were laid and a number of standard bearers were present alongside bus personnel and Merchant Navy members.

Andy Sheppard, a branch member who knew him from those days, said they worked together for over 10 years for the Bristol Bus Company. Michael as a driver at the Winterstoke Depot, Andy as Senior Inspector in Radio Control. Being in the control unit he didn't meet staff face to face but recognised voices. That's how he met Michael. He said he was a conscientious driver, proud of his job and

rarely had a problem. When he did call, he was easily recognised and they knew him as "FLEMING one M". In 2000 they both spent a year at the new Hengrove Depot. During this time, Andy got to know Michael better and appreciate his undoubtedly Scottish brand of humour. If in favour, he might offer you a sweet but saying "only take one, they are ALL numbered".

Andy said he will miss Michael for all his work for the association but also as a friend, one to depend on how ever rough the weather. "JUST TO REMIND YOU, HANDS IN POCKET, PAY YOUR SUBS"! This was the cry that went out from October for the next few months every year.

Michael's commitment to the branch was total and he was friendly to everyone but a special friend to a few. I'd like to think I was one of those privileged few and I appreciated his loyalty and friendship so, on behalf of us all, thank you Michael.

Doug May, Bristol Chairman

## MN Memorial, London

On 10 August, we carried out our annual replacement of the Red Ensign at the Merchant Navy Memorial, Trinity Square Garden, London. It is a very poignant sight to see the Red Ensign proudly flying there and it means a great deal to Merchant Seafarers. The old flag was in good condition having been flown there for almost a year except for being discoloured by the traffic pollution from the nearby busy Byward Street.

The MN Memorial and the nearby Falklands Memorial are in excellent condition, being maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. They are set-off by the green lawns maintained by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets.

Trinity Square Garden was laid out in 1795 as the setting for Trinity House and the garden was preserved as open space under a Special Act of Parliament in 1797. Within the public garden is the Merchant Navy Memorial, consisting of the First World War section by Sir Edwin Lutyens and the Second World War section by Sir Edward Maufe, laid out in the form of a sunken garden.

Tim Brant



## For All Seafarers

Even in peace, scant quiet is at sea;  
In war, each revolution of the screw,  
Each breath of air that blows the colours  
free,  
May be the last life movement known to  
you.

Death, thrusting up and down, may  
disunite  
Spirit from body, purpose from the hull,  
With thunder, bringing leaving of the light,  
With lightning letting nothingness annul.

No rock, no danger, bears a warning sign,  
No lighthouse scatters welcome through the  
dark;  
Above the sea, the bomb; afloat, the mine;  
Beneath the gangs of the torpedo-shark.

Year after year, with insufficient guard,  
Often with none, you have adventured thus;  
Some, reaching harbour, maimed and battle-  
scarred,  
Some, never more returning, lost to us.

But, if you 'scape, tomorrow, you will steer  
To peril once again, to bring us bread,  
To dare again, beneath the sky of fear,  
The moon-moved graveyard of your  
brothers dead.

You were salvation to the army lost,  
Trapped, but for you, upon the Dunkirk  
beach;  
Death barred the way to Russia, but you  
crossed;  
To Crete and Malta, but you succoured each.

Unrecognized, you put us in your debt;  
Unthanked, you enter, or escape, the grave;  
Whether your land remember or forget  
You saved the land, or died to try to save.

John Masefield



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## Pictured Vessels:

- 1: SS Lanarkshire
- 2: Hemitrochus
- 3: Bristolian
- 4: Port Nicholson
- 5: Patricia
- 6: Bamenda Palm
- 7: Shipwrecked Mariners
- 8: SS Robin
- 9: SS Great Britain
- 10: Hindlea + Edmund & Mary Lifeboat
- 11: Dominion Monarch
- 12: Ross Eagle & Ellerman Wilson
- 13: Nicolas Bowater
- 14: Titanic
- 15: Atlantic Conveyor
- 16: Shieldhall with a "J", The Solent 2012
- 17: "See the Liners from the Line" inc. Empress of Scotland
- 18: Yorkshire Coast
- 19: The Atlantic Charter - Churchill
- 20: Kenrix on the river
- 21: Atlantic Challenge
- 22: Caesarea
- 23: Grimsby Town
- 24: Evelyn

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TOMORROW  
YOU MAY NEED US**

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