

The CACHALOT

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTHAMPTON MASTER MARINERS' CLUB

No 116

September 2026

Captain's Log

Fellow Cachalots,

Your Captain attended one function since the last newsletter: a Courtesy Call on the Lord Mayor of Southampton. I think there was probably about fifty people there, all representing various Southampton organisations, and I was honoured to attend. Food and drink was provided and, as you can see, I was happy to make inroads on the spread. (It may be an awful long time since I was a cadet, but subconsciously I must still think food is part of my wages!).



The Lord Mayor did apologise about the heat in the building. It was designed in the 1920's and certainly not with air-conditioning. I've been there before and found the section of burnt floorboard caused by a German incendiary bomb. A sobering reminder of much more difficult times.

As I sit here gently perspiring, I trust and hope that you are all comfortable and keeping well in the current heatwave. (Usually, staring at a blank computer screen and the thought of writing a few lines for the Cachalots newsletter is what makes me break out in a sweat). I count myself lucky in that I've been piloting for the last few weeks. (Can I mention Portsmouth and get away with it in the hallowed pages of this magazine?). Getting on the water has provided a slight reprieve from the 30°+



temperatures. Though, at the back of my mind, I am apprehensive for the months ahead. Can we expect extreme winter storms? As the mariners among us who remember their "met" will tell you, all this heat is storing an awful lot of energy in the atmosphere, and that energy creates storms. And, as every pilot will tell you, it's the wind that's the problem!

Last Wednesday, like the rest of the country, I watched the partial eclipse. Unlike most of the rest of the country, I watched it through my sextant. (Somewhere in this house, we have some French eclipse glasses from 1999, but I can't find them). Using my sextant caused me to reflect (get it?) on the enjoyment and wonder I used to get from taking star sights, particularly in the Tropics. The stars ever so bright, and the Milky Way reaching across the sky in all its magnificence. A humbling experience when you consider how insignificant the earth is among that great constellation of stars. Yet it's our home and the extremes of weather we've been experiencing is proof positive that we really need to take better care of it.

And on the subject of twilight, I'll finish on a sad note and record the passing of Ken Dagnall. Smooth seas and following winds,

Bill

Boatsteerer's Locker

As you are probably aware, and with great sadness our former Boatsteerer, Ken Dagnall MBE went aloft on Friday 7th August. His funeral will take place at Test Valley crematorium at **1130 on Wednesday 16th September**. It will be followed by a wake at The Mortimer Arms, Ower. Those attending are asked to notify me: boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk

Functions - Terry Clark and I are co-ordinating events for the time being while Julia Whorwood has offered to make the bookings and liaise with Everest Cuisine for the curry lunch events on Saturdays. Please drop an email to boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk and to office@cachalots.org.uk if you wish to attend.

A programme of events is posted on the noticeboard in the Club room and is available on the Cachalots website for 2026-2027.

The Merchant Navy Day Service at Holyrood will be held at 1200 on Sunday 7th September. All are welcome.

With no apology for the possible duplication here. A curry lunch has been arranged following the Merchant Navy Day Service of Remembrance on Sunday 7th September at Holyrood church, Southampton. It is booked for 1330 at Everest Cuisine, our usual host. Please notify Terry or me or mark the list on the noticeboard in the Club room by Friday 5th September.

Cachalots Golf Day - the next golf day is booked for Friday 11th September at Wellow Golf Club. Contact me if you wish to join us.

Trafalgar Dinner – Wednesday 21st October 2025 at the RBL

With regret, it was decided not to hold the dinner at The Grand this year due to concerns about cost and numbers. However, we will hold the dinner for Cachalots and their guests. with a maximum number of 42 seats available at the RBL. Please notify the Boatsteerer or Office if you wish to attend.

Further we have also decided to 'pause' the **Harpooners' Dinner** for this year.

Sea Pie Supper – Friday 5th February 2027 at Mike Channon Suite, St. Mary's Stadium. Tickets will be on sale from Friday 6th November. Prices will be **£82** for Cachalot members and **£95** for non-Cachalot guests.

Taking the Cachalots Forward – New Website

One year on and hopefully you have taken the opportunity to register on the website to make your annual subscription and event payments through the GoCardless or Stripe payment system. *You should also have cancelled any previous Standing Order payment from your bank.*

If you are still not registered on the website or have not set up a payment mandate, please make contact at the soonest opportunity so we can assist in putting things in place. For those who are, please take the opportunity to check your details are correct and amend them on the relevant part of the personal details section.

Please make contact with the Boatsteerer or Membership Secretary if you require any assistance.

We will have our next management committee meetings in Early September and early December and the AGM in early January. Please forward to me, any items you wish to have discussed in any other business in good time.

Let us hope we have some rain but not torrential downpours through the autumn to replenish gardens and lawns etc.

Changes of roles

Boatsteerer – After six years in this role, I will be standing down with effect from the December management meeting. Noel Becket has agreed to take on the role.

I will be taking on the role of Office Administrator and working with Noel.

Office Administration – After some twenty years in the role our 'Office Admin', Richard James will be standing down with his last day at the Club being Friday 18th December 2026.

Robin

Captain Robin Plumley MBE, Boatsteerer boatsteerer@cachalots.org.uk

Kenneth (Ken) Dagnall MBE

Some words from the current Boatsteerer

It was 5th December 2015 when I first received an email from Ken, then Boatsteerer of the Cachalots stating

*“Your Club is urgently seeking before the 31st December a Staff Captain for 2016 and your name has come up as a possible candidate to put before the Club’s Past Captains at their meeting on 9th January.
I do hope that you are agreeable to fill this position as at the moment we seem to be recycling Past Captains which in my opinion is not good for the Club’s image.*

You may count upon the support of the Club’s Officers to give you all help and assistance that you may need in your year of office.

kind regards

Ken Dagnall

Boatsteerer

ps I hope that I’ve not given you indigestion or spoilt your festive season celebrations”

I have found this entry in Cachalot Number 54 dated December 2014 from the **Boatsteerer’s Locker**, being Ken’s first ‘report’.



Ken in typical pose in the Clubroom with his favourite brown sauce and a ‘Boatsteerer’ mascot, given to him by one of his grand children.

Fellow Cachalots I’m still a bit mystified as to how I reached this exalted position, as some are born to greatness, some strive for greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them, but what happened was - there I was down in the engine room with the rest of the black gang minding my own business. When feeling a bit overcome by the heat and thirst I ventured upwards to just short of the pearly gates for a breath of fresh air where I was accosted by Reg Kelso, The Boatsteerer, looking for a likely lad to help him out. The sun was shining with the wind a gentle breeze so I was encouraged to swap my sweat rag for sailors’ hat and whistle and requested to try and look intelligent like someone who knows what they are doing. Under the watchful guidance of the Boatsteerer, I soon learnt how to drink beer and show respect to my more senior Cachalots and not to disturb the Friday session with my whistle as normally there were ladies present and more importantly not to put my name down on any pieces of paper on the notice board as the paper wasn’t there for a subs. request but mainly for donations. Bless my soul within days my sailors’ hat and whistle were taken off me and replaced with a peaked cap and telescope. I was also given a long piece of wood and told that I had been promoted to ‘The Boatsteerer designate for 2015’ and shown some of the mystiques associated with that position. The most Senior of Senior of the Cachalots gave me a key which he said was for the Boatsteerer Locker which upon opening contained a moth-eaten English dictionary. I immediately looked up ‘Boatsteerer’ and found boat deck, boathook, boat drill, boathouse, boatload, boatman, boatpeople, boatswain, boatyard but no Boatsteerer, I then returned below where the work is done and fired up the magic Google pump which gave “ A boatsteerer was a position on a nineteenth-century whaleship. One of the most responsible members of the crew, his duty was to pull the forward oar (propulsion) of a whaleboat until reaching striking distance of a whale”. (so really he was an Engineer). Having reported this back to the most holy of holies for instructions he ordered me to write an article of about 500 words for The Cachalot Newsletter and overcame my objections by producing a Job Description document on parchment and told not to put my oily fingerprints on it and that I was no longer designate but it had been agreed by others in my absence that I was elevated henceforth to the full position of Boatsteerer. (My good lady Margaret on hearing this exclaimed “Oh God! I hope they know what they’re letting themselves in for”)

Project Anchor

Southampton Sea Cadets have embarked on a major new project and have commenced a campaign to raise funds, as below. The Cachalots would hope to support them in any way we can.



Southampton

PROJECT ANCHOR | FUNDRAISING APPEAL

Securing our site and future-proofing our ambition for the local community and maritime industry

1942 SERVING THE CITY SINCE	80+ CADETS, WITH A WAITING LIST	25+ ADULT VOLUNTEERS	12,000 sq ft WATERFRONT SITE TO SECURE	£400,000 CAMPAIGN TARGET
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WHO WE ARE

Southampton Sea Cadets has given young people aged 10-18 life-changing experiences on and off the water for over 80 years: nautical training, leadership development and nationally recognised qualifications. Our waterfront position on the River Itchen places us within easy reach of communities right across the city, making us a truly inclusive unit that appeals to everyone. We also work with surrounding units to facilitate waterborne activity. We are at full capacity with a waiting list, many cadets go on to maritime careers, and many return as adult volunteers.

THE OPPORTUNITY

After 30 years as tenants, we have a once-in-a-generation chance to **buy our site outright**. We are in negotiation to acquire the land we operate from, ending lease uncertainty and rising rents forever. Ownership also lets us repair the failing sea wall, protecting the site and the River Itchen environment for future generations, and unlocking the ambition of a purpose-built headquarters for 150+ cadets and future generations.

"With over 80 cadets, strong junior growth, national-level success, excellent adult volunteer progression and outstanding community and industry links, the unit sets the benchmark for excellence in the Southern Area."

NATIONAL CAPTAIN, SEA CADET CORPS, ANNUAL REVIEW

THREE PROJECT PHASES

PHASE 1

ACQUIRE THE LAND

Purchase the currently leased land we occupy and expand the plot to secure our waterfront site.

£150,000*

*Based on current valuations and negotiations. Subject to change as discussions progress.

PHASE 2

STABILISE THE SEA WALL

Protect the land and preserve the ecosystem and biodiversity of the River Itchen, a rare chalk stream.

£250,000*

*Based on current quotes, subject to change after detailed surveys.

PHASE 3

A NEW HEADQUARTERS

A purpose-built HQ serving 150+ cadets, the local community and the maritime industry.

TBC

Future fundraising campaign, to follow Phases 1 and 2.

CAMPAIGN TARGET (PHASES 1 & 2) £400,000

YOUR SUPPORT WILL

- Secure a permanent waterfront home for generations of Southampton's young people
- Preserve the River Itchen environment, ecosystem and biodiversity
- Enable expansion to 150+ cadets and unlock the ambition of a new headquarters

HOW YOU CAN HELP

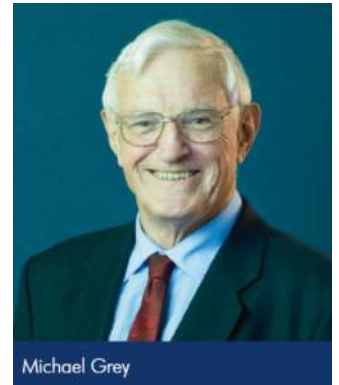
Every contribution, whether a donation, grant, sponsorship or pro-bono support, moves us closer to owning our future. We would be delighted to show you round the unit and discuss how your support can be recognised.

Contact us: UMC-fundraising@sotonsea-cadets.org

Dangers of distraction

The Maritime Advocate online Issue 914 August 14th 2026

By Michael Grey MBE



Without delving too deep into any debates about gender, some of us are better than others at "multi-tasking". But the arrival of hand-held, portable communication devices has led to us all, at some time, communicating, when our attention should have been upon something more urgent. It is why many governments now ban the use of mobile phones while driving a road vehicle; a thoroughly sensible idea until you wake up to the fact the daft digitisers in automotive design have inflicted touchscreens to further distract drivers from their main task of staying on the road.

In a maritime context, the potential distraction of mobile devices aboard ship has been a matter of debate, practically from the day they first went to sea. The list of casualties where such distraction has been a contributor, if not the sole cause, has lengthened over the years and still features in reports. Just last week there came a US National Transportation Safety Board report into a fatal collision in a US river, where a bulk carrier ran down a towboat causing the death of a crew member.

In this particular case, the pilot of the large ship had been engaged in an extensive nonwork-related conversation with a colleague over his phone, while simultaneously uttering helm orders. The bridge team were heavily criticised for tolerating this behaviour, although they seemed to lack the necessary confidence to ask the pilot to be more attentive to his duties. You do not need much of a memory to recall the vastly expensive grounding of a containership in another US port with precisely the same root cause, just a couple of years ago, so this message did not universally register.

Distraction is surely well recognised by now as a regular but mostly preventable cause of marine accidents, some of them bordering on the comical, such as the recordings of a master giving his agent ashore a piece of his mind, as his second officer sought unsuccessfully to alert him to the fact that he was conning his chemical tanker onto a sandbank. It is not always communication that is the problem; well informed officers will treasure the report of the OOW carefully scrolling down the arrival checklist as the vessel prematurely arrived at the berth. The saga of the garbage reporting form that was indirectly responsible for the cruise ship clouting a box-boat will live for ever in the archives. But lives have been lost, vast environmental harm has been caused and careers blighted by distraction, so we maybe should not joke about these things.

Distraction comes in many forms, but one fundamental is that too few people are trying to do too many things at the same time. It is welcome that at long last, the classification societies are trying to get some order into the proliferation of alarms from equipment, that drives people crazy at their particular coal face. If they succeed, it will be a blessed relief.

Is it sensible to institute bans on the use of mobile phones, as some operators have done, as a means of reducing the risk of distraction? The current Nautical Institute Seaways magazine has an excellent discourse on the subject where the author, Captain James Foong FNI suggests that the issue "is not the device, but the discipline". It is a wide-ranging article, noting that distraction comes in manifold forms, from the more familiar problem on a busy bridge or engine control room, to somebody pre-occupied with their device walking into hazards on deck from falling objects or swinging loads. "In a high-risk situation," Captain Foong points out, "divided attention can kill". But he also emphasises how many are the "business cases" for the use of the mobile phone, which convert the device from a convenience into an essential tool for all manner of functions. Sharing photographs of equipment, recording incidents, and in so many other ways, the phone has become invaluable. The phone, he notes "is an essential modern tool; a camera, notebook, calculator, torch, translator, communication device, evidence recorder and personal safety aid". Discipline in its use needs to be enforced, and who could disagree with this commonsense approach.

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and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey MBE greyrjm@gmail.com



The Shipping Festival Service 2026



At 1830 on Thursday 11th June, Officers of the Club and the Clergy welcomed distinguished guests in St. Michael's Square prior to the inspection, by the Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire, of the Guard of Honour and Flag Parties, formed by the Southampton Sea Cadets and Cadets from Warsash.

The Service commenced at 19:00 sharp with six bells on the 'Penda' bell, struck by Post Captain Nick Jeffery. Following the Procession, the Flags and Ensigns were received by Bishop Geoff Annas, making a welcome return to the Service, and shown below with the Rev. Canon David Miller of St. Michael's prior to the Procession.

After the Service the congregation was invited to an informal reception at nearby *George's Restaurant*



Stowaway Nigel Atkinson, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Hampshire, is greeted by the Lord Mayor, Cllr Pat Evemy, (above) and by the Sheriff (Deputy Lord Mayor) Kat Barbour, (below).



Spinnaker descent



Julia Whorwood and her friend and fellow volunteer **Kathy Collins** successfully abseiled down the Spinnaker Tower in Portsmouth on the 14th June, raising funds for the **Southampton Maritime Volunteer Service**



Look Mum - no hands

First tentative steps



Into their stride



Laid back



The jubilant duo are welcomed back to terra-firma by John & Louise Noble



Presentation to Solent Dolphin onboard 'Alison MacGregor'

On August 11th 2026 our Boatsteerer Robin Plumley handed over a cheque for £1500 to Bill Munt, Deputy Chair of Solent Dolphin. The donation was raised by the Captain's Charity during 2025, including the Golf Days, and was kindly made available to Solent Dolphin as they were the nominated charity of our 2025 Captain, Nick Jeffery.

Several members of both organisations met on board 'Alison MacGregor' for the presentation, during which Robin spoke about the support given to charities by the Cachalots who are very pleased to support the very valuable work done by Solent Dolphin. A former Cachalot had been an AM crew member and Solent Dolphin was Robin's own charity of choice when he was captain in 2017 so this donation is particularly relevant to the Cachalots. Bill in turn thanked the Cachalots for their continued support, advising that such a generous donation goes a long way to offsetting the increased cost of the considerable volume of fuel she consumes every week - and keeping crew and passengers supplied with drinks and biscuits of course!

On behalf of all of the whole team at Solent Dolphin, thank you Cachalots, for your continued support.

To update you on the activity of Alison MacGregor this year - considering the extent of mechanical upgrades undertaken last winter, she had very few 'shake-down' issues and has performed very well throughout the season. She has been pretty well full of passengers on every trip since May 1st - three trips a day Monday to Friday and two on Saturdays and Sundays. The season comes to a close at the end of September when we will take her ashore again and prepare for more fun in 2027!



Trafalgar Dinner

Wednesday 21st October at the RBL
1830 for 1900

As announced by the Boatsteerer on page 2, it has been decided not to hold The Admiral of the Port's Trafalgar Dinner at The Grand, as previously, this year.

The dinner was organised and run by the Cachalots on behalf of the Lord Mayor, the Southampton Sea Cadets and the wider local maritime community. It was intended purely to raise funds for the Southampton Sea Cadets, with the Club hoping to cover its costs. The event last year raised **£1192** from the Grand Draw, bringing the total raised over seven such functions to **£9322**. But, for the past couple of years we have struggled to make the numbers required to make it viable, with just a small minority of those attending being Club members.

With a projected ticket price this year of around £100 it was feared that the Club would be exposed to a significant loss and it was reluctantly decided to hold a smaller, in house, function at the RBL Club instead, for Cachalots and their guests.

It will NOT be a black-tie dinner and numbers will be limited to 42, the max for the room. Catering will be by Chef Sam with the menu as below:

*Hearty British' Field Mushrooms served with paprika cream Sauce
finished in a feuillette case*

*'Fleet Broadside' Roast topside of Beef served with creamed
Horseradish Potato, glazed Tenderstem Broccoli and Red wine Jus.*

*Vegetarian Option - Beetroot & Goats cheese Wellington along with
the creamed Potato, Broccoli and jus*

*'Hardy's Finale' Best of British Cheese Board' s served with crackers
& Chutney*

Tea & Coffee

Cost £40

See the back page for details of a forthcoming talk,
on Zoom,

By our own Boatsteerer

Capt. Robin Plumley MBE

A Postcard from the Southern Seas

Cachalot Colin Crimp and Jill Fitzpatrick are inveterate travellers and their experiences have appeared in these pages before. In January this year they embarked on a 76 night Grand Voyage on Fred Olsen's 'Borealis'.

Here is the first episode of their account of their experiences in the (mainly) Southern Seas.



As we sat on our balcony in Southampton, on the port side of deck 6 on 'Borealis', a balcony which was, at that moment, overlooking Marchwood waste incinerator (a building not without its own charm), an announcement was made.

"Due to worsening weather in the Atlantic and resulting conditions in the Bay of Biscay we have decided to delay our departure for 2 days". We were further advised that this would result in missing our port calls in La Corunna and Cape Verde and that we would be heading straight for Las Palmas in the Canaries the day after tomorrow. On the plus side, we were advised, there would be a free shuttle bus tomorrow morning enabling us to spend a day exploring Southampton. Living, as we do, in Winchester, a mere 8 miles away, such a prospect was not overwhelming.

'Borealis' had about 1100 passengers on board (although, apparently, she can accommodate up to 1400) and about 600 crew and was built in 1997 as Holland America's 'Rotterdam'. Since 2021 and a major refit, she has been a Fred ship, along with her sister, originally the 'Amsterdam', now renamed 'Bolette'. As we sat on our balcony, still in Southampton, we surmised that this lucky circumstance would enable us to familiarise ourselves with the layout of the ship and locate the exact position of all the available bars without having to stagger about in heavy weather. Positive thinking is always a bonus.

It was a complete accident that we enrolled in the ukulele class. We only popped our heads round the door of the small Auditorium to see what the noise was and the next thing we knew we seemed to be holding ukuleles and strumming a C major. And we were still in Southampton.

However, the very next day as we slid effortlessly down a slightly choppy Southampton Water, one of the passengers was heard to say "Look, it's perfectly alright. Don't know what all the fuss is about". Of course, a couple of hours later, heading southwest out of the English Channel, the full power of Atlantic Beaufort 9 showed itself. Significant wave height was around 7 metres coming from dead ahead and the pitching was impressive. In his midday address, the captain explained to those who were interested that this meant 30% of the waves would be 7 metres or more, and that once in 24 hours there might be one twice as high. That night, at precisely 0300, we ploughed into that 'once in 24 hours' wave. There was a mighty boom, 'Borealis' shook herself, the pillows shifted off the bed and all our champagne glasses toppled over and rolled around the shelf against the fiddle rail. Going to the bathroom became either a downhill sprint or an uphill slog. No further sleep was possible.



The sand dunes of Maspalomas, Gran Canaria



Waterfront at Mogan, Gran Canaria

But by the time we got to the Canary Islands, both wind and waves had calmed down and after four days at sea, we docked in **Las Palmas, Gran Canaria**, noiselessly and in the early hours of the morning.

The port itself seemed very busy, including naval ships, a fishing harbour, Ro-Ro and bulk cargo berths, container port and cruise terminal, not to mention all the offshore drilling kit tied up or at anchor. For our first run ashore, the bus took us south to walk on the amazing wild sand dunes of Maspalomas, then west to the nice little tourist beach town of **Mogan** where we had coffee and joined a catamaran ferry to Puerto Rico (no, not that one). With the bus ride back north to Las Palmas, in one day we had seen a great deal of this little volcanic island. But the next port of call was in Brazil, so 'Borealis' set off in haste to the southwest, reaching around 18 knots. The absence of any noise or vibration was quite remarkable. That evening, for those that wished, there was a 'sail-away' barbecue around the pool where almost the entire buffet restaurant ('The View') was re-created, along with a large BBQ, around the swimming pool – with the roof opened a bit to let out the smoke – a remarkable sight complete with fantastical illuminated ice-sculptures. This wondrous transformation was to become quite a regular happening throughout the Grand Voyage.



BBQ on the pool deck on board 'Borealis'



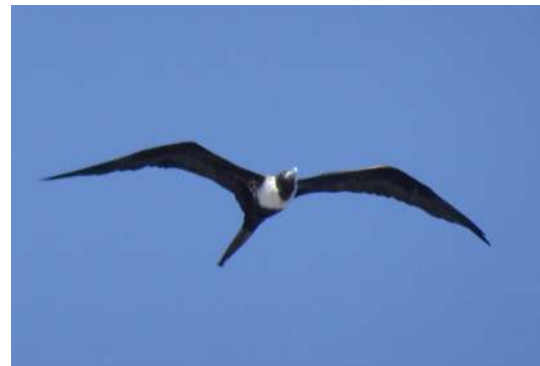
Payment of dues going south across the equator

This 6-day passage across the Atlantic towards Brazil involved, of course, crossing the equator and, as everyone will know, that means seeking permission to do so from King Neptune. The subsequent ceremony on the pool deck resulted in much hilarity and a lot of the crew getting wet, even the captain did not escape. Clearly, the deal with Neptune covered a sort of 'period return' ticket as there seemed to be no necessity for such antics as we later crossed back over the line in the Pacific. And there were flying fish! Some so small you could mistake them for dragon flies and these were to become a common sight in warmer waters throughout the trip.

As is very often the case with such a voyage, among the passengers there were plenty of amateur wildlife photographers, as well as some professional wildlife experts. These people would spend most of their time keeping a lookout on one of the outside decks, the photographers especially. We spoke to one of them at a time when there was a lot of bird activity, particularly the booby, a very large seabird that dives at high speed into the water to catch fish. The photographer's camera lens, like most of his clothes, was camouflaged and it was big, about the size of a small dustbin. He showed us a picture that he had just taken of a booby emerging from the water with a fish in its beak. The image was absolutely stunning – that's what you get from dedication, patience and a very big lens. There was also a large number of black and sinister-looking frigate birds about, wheeling around in the sky above, riding the air currents generated by 'Borealis' at 18 knots and generally misbehaving. At one time we counted twenty of them. They were like the hyenas of the sky. When a booby emerged from the sea with a fish, a mob of frigate birds would attack and force it back down to the water surface where they would steal the fish and then fight noisily among themselves about who ate it. Very bad behaviour.



The hard-working Booby – the victim



The sinister frigate bird – the perpetrator

By the time we approached Brazil, the temperature was heading for a very humid 30C, the ship's choir of about 70 was finding it's voice under the tutelage of the four amazing professionals of the Borealis Performers and even the ukulele band was getting vaguely better. The Borealis Amateur Dramatics group, however – I have to say that we were not involved, well you can't do everything – gave an impromptu performance on the main stage under the name of BAD Productions. Well, that says it all, really. However, in the spirit of positive thinking, they could only get better - the only possible way was up.

One of the down-sides of Brazil in February is that, everywhere you go, it's Carnival Time. Now that might sound a bit "Bah, Humbug!" but we learned a few things in **Salvador**. As we approached Farol de Barra, the first lighthouse built in Brazil by the Portuguese colonists and now a museum, we could see stalls being set up on every street, huge stages being erected with speaker cabinets the size of small houses and everywhere there were vendors on bicycles selling warm water and beer and heaven knows what else. Then the lady tour guide filled us in on Carnival. "*Originally, Carnival was a long weekend (Friday to Tuesday) but now it lasts a week, and it starts tomorrow. Basically, everyone dances continuously for 24 hours a day to painfully loud music and drinks until they fall over in the gutter. Drugs are now more of a problem too. As a result, I shall be leaving town tonight along with a lot of the local people and won't be back until it's over*". There was indeed a heavy police presence building in the streets and a large fleet of road tankers was assembled ready to hose down the streets every night.

Salvador is a city of two halves. Lower Town, much of it built on reclaimed land, is docks, commercial buildings and a lot of poverty. Behind the docks, at the top of the red cliffs and all built since about 1980, is Upper Town. Up there, on one side of the steep valley, is modern development – high rise blocks, villas and shopping malls. On the other side, small and crumbling brick-built hovels still cling to the side of the cliffs. There is stark contrast everywhere you look.



Farol de Barra, Salvador



Orisha statues – Oxala or Virgin Mary?

You would think that Brazil having, over centuries, become a blend of Indigenous ‘indians’, Spanish conquistadores and African slaves plus one or two others, might harbour some degree of tension, but not a bit of it. Everyone seems to be simply Brazilian, wherever they sit on the scale from very white through coffee to very black. And that’s before you factor in the mixture of Amazonian and African tribal practices with Roman Catholicism. This seems to be dealt with by each set of beliefs absorbing bits from the others. The floating Orisha statues in the Tororo lake are definitely Afro Brazilian Candomble deities, but the white one at the front is often considered to double as the Virgin Mary when convenient. The Bonfin Catholic Cathedral was very ornate as would be expected from such a mix. Standing next to the statuette of the Virgin Mary was another Saint of indeterminate but much more local origin. One of the side chapels was exclusively given over to healing and miracles. This was the place where you would go to pray for a miracle or give thanks for a limb restored. On each occasion, a model representation of the successful miracle would be suspended from the ceiling. It was thus festooned with little plastic hands, arms, ears, feet, legs - whatever organ had been restored. There was probably even a prostate or two up there somewhere. There were so many of these artifacts that most of the ornate ceiling itself could no longer be seen. It was a just a bit macabre. At least, I’m reasonably sure they were plastic.

By the old shipyards of Salvador (now just doing a few yacht repairs) is a stunning Italianate manor house built for the Amado Bahia family at the end of the 19th century. It has now been fully restored along with its Italian marble floors and its original cast iron balconies, columns, railings and staircases, all shipped out from England. But the real highlight of Salvador was the huge ice cream parlour. It accommodated over 70 of us without batting an eyelid. The range of flavours was immense. And then I saw it. Ovaltine ice cream. It was indescribably wonderful.



The Amado Bahia family manor



Now that’s an ice-cream parlour.

After a couple of days at sea the ship berthed in **Rio de Janeiro**, the carnival capital of the world and it was, of course, the middle of Carnival week. For those Carnival aficionados on board, this was an opportunity to get an all-night fix and, for a little extra, an actual seat in the stands. Yes, it all takes place in a long stadium. The procession streams in at one end and then out of the other, although it was reported as being not so much a ‘stream’ but a more sporadic and fragmented procession of drumming and spectacular costumes and gyrating buttocks. Apparently, those that went to see the Carnival got back to the ship at about 4 am. By contrast, we headed off later that morning to the Tijuca rainforest in a 10-seater open jeep.

In order to get up to the Tijuca National Park we bounced in our jeep through ever smaller and steeper back streets of Rio and eventually into the forest at a very humid 31C. During the 18th century all these forest areas suffered severe deforestation to provide timber and to clear for cattle grazing and coffee plantations. This affected the natural water courses to such an extent that a reliable water supply for the city became unsustainable. As early as 1817 this was recognised and a tree-felling ban was introduced followed by a long program of re-forestation. A large part of this program was carried out by 6 slaves (so its not all good news) who planted over 100,000 native trees in a 26-year period in the mid-19th century. The result has been a gradual return of this vast area to native rain forest, located in a heavily protected National Park.



Transport to the Tajuca rainforest, Rio

We admired the dramatic Taunay waterfall and watched toucans flying through the trees, capuchin monkeys in the canopy and everywhere there were butterflies so bright that they could have been dressed for the Carnival. We walked through the dense trees, past the ruins of a coffee farm now reclaimed by the forest and into a clearing where a picnic had been prepared. It was all just a bit magical and there were very few mosquitoes. There were Brazilwood trees, however, now a well-protected species. Their timber is very even-grained and was used extensively in construction and for making musical instruments and bows. It can also be used for making a rich red dye hence both its name and its popularity for felling.

Our return through the city was slowed by having to run the gauntlet of bits of break-away street carnival, more drumming, spectacular costumes and gyrating buttocks etc.



Taunay Falls, Tajuca rainforest

By way of a change, the show on the Borealis main stage that evening was a performance by a Brazilian group, called the Carnival Performers. This consisted of loud drumming, spectacular costumes and – you get the idea.



The train up to Christ the Redeemer...



....and a short break in the cloud

You can't go to Rio de Janeiro without ascending Corcorado mountain to see the iconic concrete and soapstone statue of Christ the Redeemer. It could be argued that the most impressive view of the statue is from down on the ground, but there's something about going up there and looking back down on the city. It was both a Sunday and it was Carnival, maybe not the best time to chase a world-renowned view, but after a long wait in the crush, we eventually caught a train on the rack railway that goes nearly to the summit. It was very hot and very full. This railway has a single track over 2 miles long and ascends about 2400 feet and there are 3 trains so there are places where they have to pass. It's always a temptation to peer anxiously out of the window to make sure they do miss each other, never mind that they've been doing this since 1884. At the end of the line, the climbing is still not done. A vertical elevator followed by an escalator are then needed. The escalator ascended into the cloud and as we reached the huge feet of Christ the Redeemer we looked down and saw . . . cloud. We looked up and saw . . . cloud. But fear not, the wind blew and through occasional wispy gaps we could sometimes see both Rio de Janeiro and the very top of the Art Deco icon.

The next day, we swapped the coolness of the summit of Corcorado for the blistering heat of our next port of call – the island of **Ilhabela**. 'Borealis' anchored off and 4 of the lifeboats were pressed into service as tenders. By mid-day in Sao Paolo it was 37C, so the 1.5 hour trip to Jabaquara Beach on a beautiful timber schooner (with 80 passengers sitting round the gunwhale in the shade) was a blessing. Some went ashore there in a Zodiac, some just jumped overboard and swam, others stayed on board in the shade. The air – and indeed the sand – were so hot, there was really only one thing to do. Sit in a deck-chair under an umbrella on the beach and have a nice cold beer. The return voyage to Sao Paolo was every bit as delightful as the outward journey, especially as the little café we then found behind the main street had air conditioning.

To be continued



Jabaquara beach, Ilhabela, Brazil . . .

. . . by schooner



Making maritime memories

The Maritime *Advocate* online Issue 913 August 2nd 2026

By Michael Grey MBE



It is that time of year again, when the columnists on proper newspapers head off to their Tuscan villas, the experience currently made rather less fulfilling by the three-hour queue to submit their Euro-fingerprints. There is also the nagging nervousness that the substitute will be so brilliant that the Editor will decide your services are henceforth redundant. Not for this columnist, alas. Let us not be negative, the holiday memories will surely be delightful and you hopefully will not end up on the scrapheap.

Which brings us effortlessly to a rather delightful little story (stolen from this Ships' Monthly) of the lucky passengers on a 30-year old Japanese cruise ship which is being sent for recycling. Past guests aboard this elegant old lady are being invited to buy bits of their old ship, which will afford them with a pleasant conversation piece in their Tokyo apartments. One presumes that the gesture specifies some tableware, or even a table and chairs, rather than a radar antennae or section of the crankshaft, but it surely will bring pleasant memories and make the cruise a little different from the norm. I sadly never took a ship to the breakers, although there was a near miss when, aboard one of our elderly Commonwealth liners in the London Docks, word came that the ship was to be taken to Scotland for scrapping (the word recycling had yet to be invented). We were already planning which bits of the ship we might appropriate when, curses, a message arrived from the Dock Office, posting me to a vessel in Liverpool and a voyage to Australia.

The chap who replaced me had no better luck, as very early on the Sunday morning before the proposed demolition voyage, as the only officer on board, he was rudely awoken by a foreign gentleman in a very loud suit, who told him that he had bought the ship. He carried with him a large Gladstone bag full of padlocks which he began to furiously apply all around the vessel, to the OOW's complete bewilderment. He finally managed to reach the duty superintendent, just before he set off for the golf course, who told him that the ship had indeed been sold and they had just forgotten to tell him. The ship eventually was to be fully laden with a scrap cargo and make her way to Taiwan. No tangible memories were available from that ship. Some 2000 cruise passengers had a voyage with a difference recently, when part of the available "excursions" included a drydocking in Damen Shiprepair's Rotterdam graving dock. It was apparently a huge success; the guests being chuffed to bits as the waters gurgled away and their ship took the blocks.

In my day, drydocking meant the inconvenience of all the toilets being locked, but modern cruise ships are clearly far more self-contained. The average intelligent person is hugely interested in the mysteries of other people's professions and love watching other people work, so the cruise organisers maybe ought to look at other ways of making their offering rather more different. Some years ago, one of the most popular attractions in the maritime museum in Chatham Dockyard was a working drydock, and when there was a coaster on the blocks the punters would be several deep around the security fence. It was also a good advertisement for modern shipping, although the welders and painters were exhorted to watch their language. Today there is a historic ship permanently in the dock, which might, to those not historically inclined, be less of an attraction. And if you are looking for memories afloat it was interesting to read that one of the older Norwegian coastal ferries has emerged from her refit as a sort of working museum, stuffed with artefacts, artwork, and the like, celebrating the history of this amazing service. That is a great idea and sure to be popular with those cruising and employing the ship as a ferry. If you have this stuff in some store ashore, why not use it?

It was several years ago that I voyaged from Helsinki to Stockholm on a huge, brand-new ferry. It was an amazing vessel with full-length atria, astonishing fittings and passenger attractions, while the bridge was like something out of the Starship Enterprise. As we made our way down the Oslofjord, the master conducted us from this space-age wheelhouse to a compartment at the back of the bridge, which had been fitted out as an elegant chartroom, from a ship of another, far earlier era. It might have seemed quixotic, but the serious purpose, we were told, was to remind the modern navigators, seated at their consoles, of the value of traditional seafaring skills. History, you see, does have a purpose.

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and the author, Cachalot Michael Grey MBE greyrjm@gmail.com

Gone Aloft

Kenneth R. Dagnall MBE

Ken Dagnall, MBE, Chevalier du Mérite maritime, CEng CMarEng FIMarEST, who went Aloft on the 7th August, was a retired Surveyor with Lloyds Register of Shipping with both 1st Class Steam & Motor Engineer qualifications. He joined the Club in January 2000 and was a popular and entertaining figure, supporting many of the Club's events. When he was appointed Boatsteerer in 2015 he was the first Engineer and non Master Mariner to hold that position (see his own take on his new status on page 3).



We are indebted to his son Steve for the following:

Being born in Birkenhead in November 1933, and with his father being at sea all his life with White Star Line and Port Line (Cunard), as a young boy Ken always wanted to go to sea. He wanted to become a Captain, but realised he would not pass the eyesight test, and instead focused on being a Marine Engineer.

His career started with a 5 year apprenticeship with a well known Merseyside ship repairer (Grayson, Rollo & Clover), under the sponsorship of Port Line. Completing this apprenticeship he joined Andrew Weir's Bank Line, known for its world-wide trading and well known for its long periods away from home, joining his first ship in 1955 : 'Lossiebank', followed by 'Weybank' and 'Eastbank' all for voyages lasting 6/7 months.

He got engaged to Margaret at that time, and not wishing to be away for long periods decided to join London & Overseas Freighters, joining 'London Splendour', whilst his fiancé looked for houses for sale. After 8 months he signed off, owning his first house and decided to get married in 1959. He then passed his 'First Class Motor Certificate' and joined the Union Castle/Clan Line with more certainty of when being back home. After 4 years, and now having 2 sons, he asked Margaret to look for shore based work, and joined Lloyds Register of Shipping, on the understanding he could be anywhere in their global offices for postings lasting up to 3 years. Starting first in the Liverpool offices.

Two years later he had his first overseas assignment to Rio de Janeiro on a 6 month temporary basis to relieve one of the surveyors. This was followed by being posted to Southampton and the family moved to Chandlers Ford for 4 years, plus a brief solo spell in Kuwait during one summer.

His next posting was to St Nazaire in France leaving on Decimal Day 1971 with the family to stay for 18 months, followed by a request to move to Dunkirk to supervise the construction of some towers and large pressure vessels for Esso Baytown refinery , and then finally to Le Havre on the understanding it was a for a year or two but lasted 19 years, and by now speaking fairly good french.

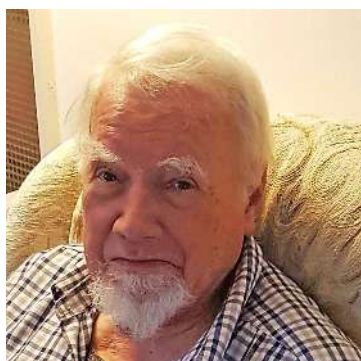
In addition to his role as a Shipping Surveyor for Lloyds, he was also appointed as Her Majesty's Honorary Consul for much of Northern France/Normandy.

Shortly before retiring he was made a 'Chevalier de l'Ordre du Mérite Maritime' for services to shipping, one of the few foreigners so awarded, and also awarded the MBE for his services.

Retiring back to the UK initially to Sevenoaks, and then moving to Hythe, both Ken and Margaret joined many local societies and kept his keen interest in Shipping. Margaret passed away in early 2023, and Ken maintained his various activities, and enjoyed family life leaving behind 2 sons, 7 grandchildren and 9 great grandchildren.



Robin 'Bob' Erskine Lowther



Bob Lowther went Aloft on the 24th June, aged 97.

He joined the Club in January 1983 and was Master with P&O Cargo Division

He and his wife Faye were regulars in the Clubroom for many years.

He was no longer 'on the books' being a defaulter since covid, but still considered as one of us.

New Members

Pippa Moody, on 5th June, is an experienced maritime professional with a career spanning port operations, marine safety, compliance, and incident command across both seagoing and shore-based roles. Her background includes service as a deck officer, followed by senior leadership roles ashore. Her current role is Group Marine Manager for ABP, responsible for marine safety, governance, and compliance across a wide network of UK ports. She leads the development and assurance of the Marine Safety Management System, ensuring alignment with the Port Marine Safety Code. Previously, as Deputy Harbour Master in Southampton, she developed extensive experience in port operations, vessel traffic management, pilotage, and leading operational teams in a dynamic and complex environment. She joins us to remain actively engaged with the local maritime community, share professional experience, and continue learning from peers across the industry. She says that having worked in and around Southampton for much of her career, she values the opportunity to contribute to and be part of a respected professional network with strong links to the port and its maritime heritage.

Tim Coutts, on 17th August, is a newly employed Pilot with ABP Southampton. He was previously a Pilot with PLA on the Thames for 3yrs, Captain & Chief Officer with Condor on RoRo & HSC (10yrs), Captain on RedJets (~2yrs). He was initially with Carnival UK from Cadetship through to 1st Officer. He is very interested to meet fellow professionals and marine enthusiasts around Southampton through the Cachalots, and hopes to help to keep the organisation growing.

An Apology

My sincere apologies go to Cachalot Stuart Withington and his family and friends, for any distress and embarrassment caused after I issued, before properly checking my facts from information received, a *Cachalite*, (296), stating that he had Gone Aloft.

Stuart responded sharply that he was alive and well and still playing golf.

I am happy to re-state my apology here.

Terry Clark, Editor



WORLD SHIPSOCIETY DORSET BRANCH

Zoom Meetings

The Dorset Branch, after the summer break, will resume their talks in September with one by our own Boatsteerer

12th September 2026

The Lavender Hull Mob !!

with Robin Plumley

A personal perspective of the Union-Castle Line

Their Secretary, Steve Pink, says:

There is no need to request an invitation to our events ... everyone on our circulation list will be sent a Zoom Invitation Link about a week beforehand.

To sign up, or for more information, visit their website shipsdorset.org

The CACHALOTS

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The Club room is currently open on just one day of the week, Friday, 1130 - 1500. There is no catering on site but there are many sandwich outlets within easy walking distance.

Suggestions for events, for improvements, offers of help, articles and anecdotes for inclusion in this newsletter will all be received with pleasure. We are even prepared to receive complaints if they are constructive.