



News of the BISN company, its ships and staff, its history and *histoires*, of ships and sealing wax, nautical natters, maritime miscellanies and swinging of lanterns

FROM THE EDITOR...

Welcome, Dear Reader, to what we think is the largest issue of "... calling BI" to date -- a full nine pages, no less! And a complete Pandora's Box of subjects as well. Ranging from some standard contents such as David Hammond's crew list and Mike Bowman's curry recipe to the opening section of a 136-year-old history of the founding of BISN Co. via a maritime tradition and some collapsing containers. A veritable cornucopia indeed! We have many good people to thank for this: Rhod MacNeill, Roger Northcote, Richard Henderson, John Briggs and John Prescott amongst them.

The more sharp eyed readers will notice one regular missing from this list of goodies and that is the "where are we now?" competition photograph. This is because your editor doesn't have one to give you! Come on, please dig out those shoe boxes of photographs from under the bed. You **know** you must have something for us! Your editor was tempted to ask you where his picture of *Nevasa* was taken. But he concluded that it was too obscure, although it is posted on the BI staff website. He just thinks it's a good photograph. So we can reveal this was taken in Antalya, southern Turkey.

This brings to mind a little note received from Sue Spence, the organiser of our BI reunion in Newcastle, from Turkey. A shipbreaking yard in that country obviously thinks that Sue is now running BI as a shipping company (which is *entirely* understandable) and is offering her all sorts of engine spare parts and the like! Now Sue was very good at organising the schoolchildren on the cruise ships, but I don't think she knows a scavenge pump from a valve casing. But thanks very much for your interest, Mr. Burak Aldemir. Of course, if anybody is interested in his services, please contact '[...calling BI](#)'. Mind you, looking at Gordon Thornton's photograph of an old winch on

one of his ships, it may just be that Mr. Aldemir has already done business with BI in the past!

Derek Ings has put your editor further in debt by sending him some old BI News, as has indeed Richard Henderson. Gentlemen, you are both thanked mightily. Much good material for future issues of "... calling BI". Derek writes further: "*With regard to the comments made by Ken Jones in a previous issue of the newsletter, my wife, June, well remembers Agnes Muir and also Miss Scotland and Miss Ireland as organisers of the Officers' Club. Her father, 'Nick' Carter was Honorary Treasurer of both the Officers' and Seamen's clubs in New York for many years and was awarded an OBE for his efforts*".

Our subscriptions department is asking me if anybody knows the whereabouts of Bob Hannah. The last couple of newsletters have been bounced back from the e-mail address we have, marked "over quota." Any up-to-date e-mail address would be welcomed.

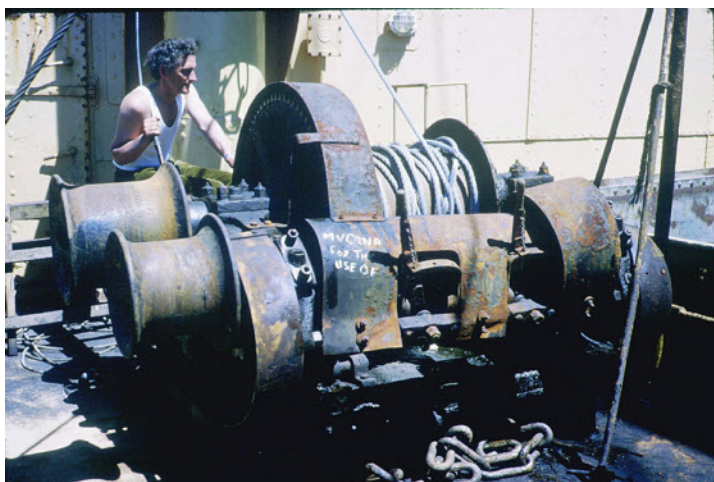


Your Editor has discovered that the forthcoming gathering of BI staffers in East Anglia [[Friday 28th May](#) at the *Thatchers Arms* - further details from [John Prescott](#) and **please** let him know

if you are likelt to be there] - coincides neatly with that establishment's bi-annual beer festival. Apparently some admirable quaffing is on offer. Come and join them!

Finally, Dear Reader, please remember that your editor's stock of material **is** exhaustible and we **do** depend upon your assistance. Your offering may not be used straight away, but it *will* be used (probably)!

Many thanks!



FROM THE BACK ISSUES...

In issue 13 of "...calling BI", we carried this photograph of Peter Venvell and Ken Long doing a bit of cargo loading. Thanks now to Dave Mitchell, who writes in to say the other main character (er..., the one in the boiler suit, of course!) is Colin Dobbin, Chief Engineer of the *Chakla* at the time. Your Editor wrongly identified him as John Pollock. Shame on him, 'cos he took the photograph! Apologies to all.



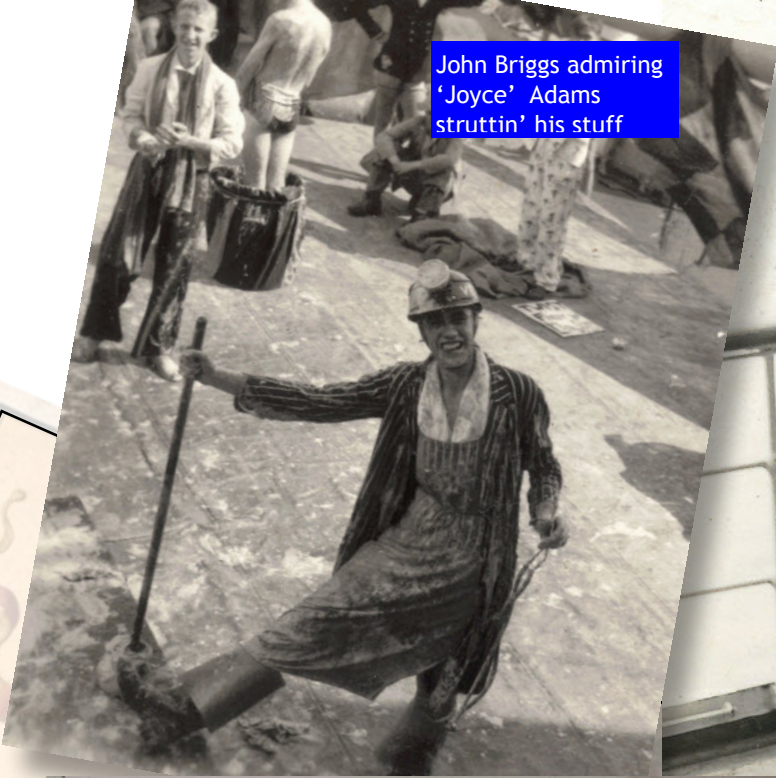
FROM THE LITTLE BLACK BOOK...

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SIRDANA GCLD
md MSA eta OSOBOOLT
cpt Laurent
2/ fox
3/ bowman
x3/ IHANGIANI
4/ KHARA
2/eng fraser
3/eng rao
x3/eng dsouza
4/eng macarthur
1/eng warwick
1/eng teague
gooniskilra
browne
cdts KAPOOR + whitson
p/o hands + carway

Many thanks to David Hammond (who appears elsewhere in this issue) for this latest crew list from his little black book. We have two Bowmans on our subscribers list - could this crew list show one of them? Are there any stories to be had here?

Write in to callingbi@btinternet.com with the lowdown!

FROM NEPTUNE'S COURT...



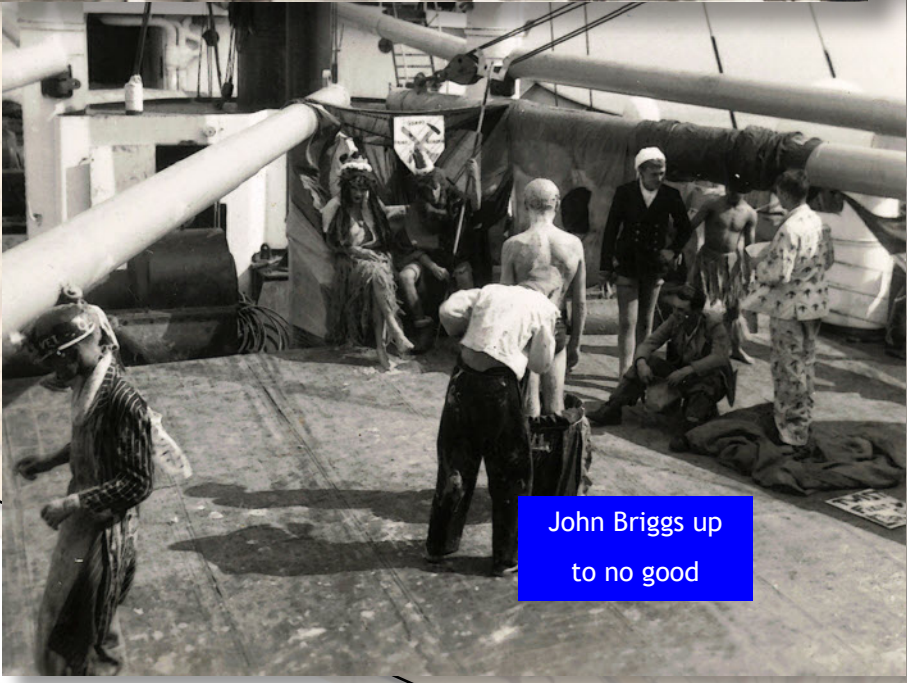
John Briggs admiring 'Joyce' Adams struttin' his stuff



Bill Leech 'pontificating'!



Kneale Barber preparing the "anointing oil"



John Briggs up to no good

Thanks to John Briggs for this set of Chindwara cadets crossing the line in 1956. Can you identify any of the other 'gentle'-men involved in this most un-holy rite?



FROM THE BEGINNING...

This article appeared in *The Geographical Review* of March, 1874, eighteen years after the formation of the Calcutta and Burma Steam Navigation Company (and later reprinted in "BI News"). It has been edited slightly.

THE BRITISH INDIA STEAM NAVIGATION COMPANY LIMITED

Among the many useful enterprises that have of late years sprung into existence out of the gradual development of the resources of India, the BISN Company deserves to be particularly noticed. The scale on which the operations of this Company are now conducted is so extensive and the punctual and regular fulfilment of its contracts is so important that it exercises influence on every port along the entire littoral of the East Indies, as well as in the Persian Gulf, Burma and the Straits of Malacca.

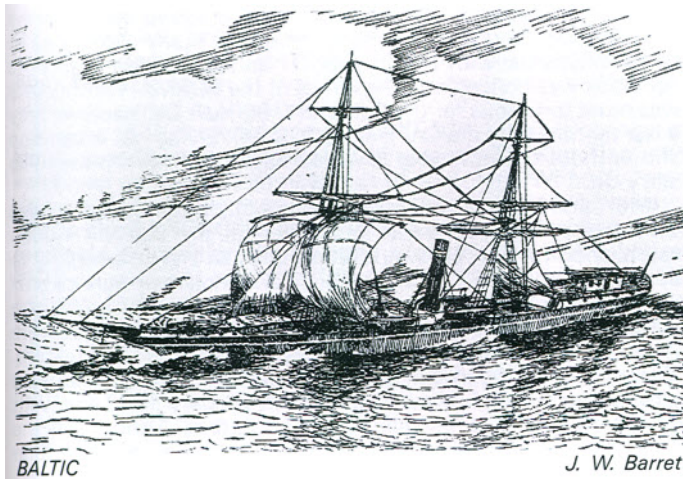
From a small beginning, it now possesses a fleet of over 40 steamers, with an aggregate tonnage of about 52,000 tons; the mileage annually to be traversed under its contracts with Government exceeds 1,100,000 miles and it employs in the service of its fleet alone over 500 European officers and engineers and more than 5,000 natives.

The history of the measures that have led to these results is of general interest and affords a happy proof of what may be accomplished by steady and prudent enterprise.

The origin of the undertaking has been not only the pioneer of steam communication on the coasts of India, but has also succeeded in developing the latent commerce between the ports of India and the ports of the neighbouring and semi-barbarous countries, to an extent which might

have well been judged impossible in so short a time. It is necessary to make a few general remarks upon the shipping trade of India and note how the progress of this Company has developed contemporaneously with the extension and growth of our Indian trade.

Eighteen years ago, Government decided upon subsidising steamers to run between Calcutta and Burma, in lieu of employing its own vessels upon this service. There were upon the eastern side of India no steamers but those of the Peninsular and Oriental Company performing the overland mail service, a few Government transports of small tonnage and power and occasional steamers employed in the opium trade; and on the western side, the Peninsular and Oriental Company had the mail services to Suez and to China. The home trade was divided between the native vessels, which put to sea only in fine weather and square-rigged ships carrying native crews and officered by Europeans.



The captains of these vessels of the "country service," as it was then termed, were proud of their employment. Their ships, admirably manned by the agile and obedient Lascars, vied with the Government vessels in smartness and dexterous handling and often during their voyages they had to be prepared for a skirmish with Gulf pirates or Malay robbers.

These ships, however, principally belonged to merchants and carried only their owner's cargoes, did little to provide for or develop general trade. One by one they have disappeared before the growth of steam and many of their captains, recognising the inevitable change, have gladly accepted appointments in the British India Steam Navigation Company's service. They brought with them not only their country experience and training, but also that *esprit de corps* and pride in the smartness and efficiency of their vessels which produces the universally tidy and trim appearance noticeable in the Company's steamers.

The introduction of a new product or industry, whatever may be its character, must have its probationary trials and vicissitudes and seldom does it happen that a pioneer reaps the full advantage of his forethought and enterprise. The British India Steam Navigation Company has been no exception to the rule, for satisfactory as have been the general results, they have not been attained without troubles and difficulties, which



might have discouraged less determined and enterprising men than those who have so well directed its operations.

The first operations of this Company date from the year 1855, in which the East India Company indicated a desire for a mail service between Calcutta and Burma. Early in the following year a small private Company was formed under the title of the Calcutta and Burma Steam Navigation Company by the gentlemen who still retain the control and direction of the present Company. There being no time to build ships, the young Company purchased two small steamers of about 600 tons each, the *Cape of Good Hope* and the *Baltic* and despatched them to India round the Cape, to commence operations early in 1857, under a contract with the Government of India for a semi-monthly service between Calcutta,

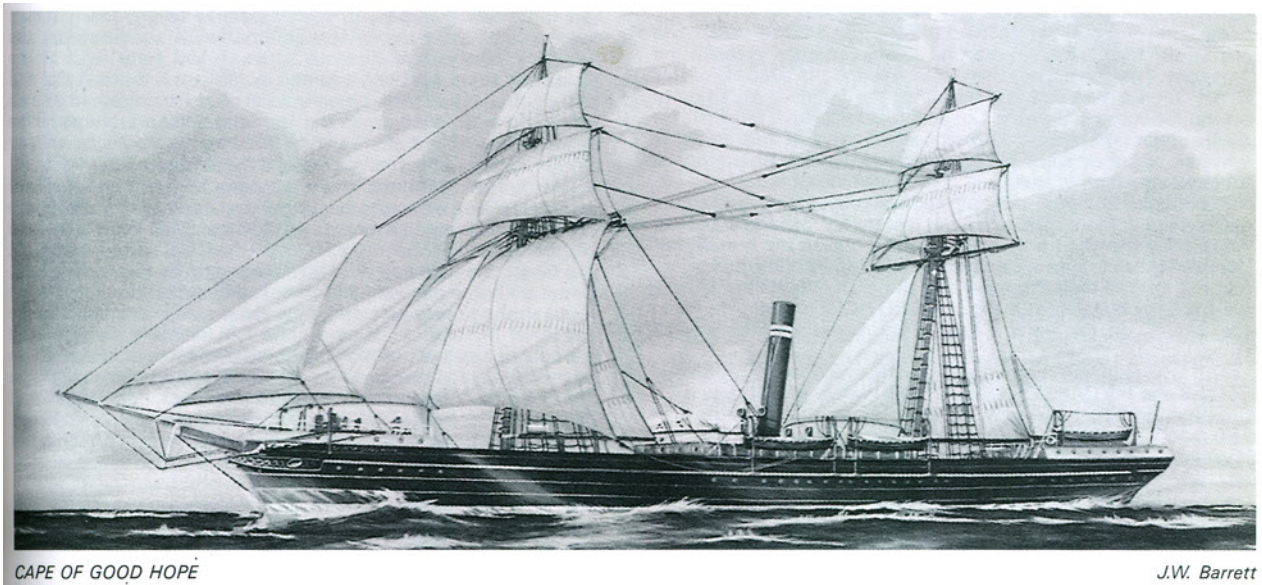
Akyab, Rangoon and Moulmein. The outward voyages of these small steamers were tedious and expensive; and on arrival, they were found, as might have been expected, to be in some respects unsuitable for the trade. The early results were not altogether encouraging.

At the outbreak of the Mutiny in 1857, the Company rendered its first important service to Government by bringing up from Ceylon to Calcutta half of the 35th Regiment, being the first detachment of European troops that came to the assistance of India from the outside world. This demand for transport was beneficial to the Company and, with the Burma trade

also improving, the directors decided the Directors decided to build a third steamer of larger power and capacity. A contract was accordingly entered into for the steamer *Burma*, of 900 tons and of greater speed than the two smaller ones and to be built to all the requirements of a tropical climate. The *Burma* reached Calcutta in 1858 and met with general approval.

In 1859 a further steamer, the *Governor Higginson*, was purchased and was sent to open up a regular trade at the ports between Calcutta and Madras. This was a service then considered impracticable by marine authorities and was found so un-remunerative that, on the Government chartering the vessel for temporary employment between Madras and Rangoon this portion of the coast trade was abandoned for a time.

Being desirous, however, of developing this new line, the Company contracted for another steamer, called the *Calcutta*, which was unfortunately wrecked on the Wicklow Bank, in Ireland, fifteen hours after leaving the Clyde [this



CAPE OF GOOD HOPE

J.W. Barrett

seems to be the beginning of a trend - see next issue: Ed]. Previously to this the *Cape of Good Hope* had been run down in the Hooghly by one of the Peninsular and Oriental Company's steamers and to supply these deficiencies, the Company purchased the steamer *Rangoon*, then building, and contracted for other two steamers – the *Coringa* and the *Moulmein*.

(to be continued in our next issue)

(illustrations from Laxon & Perry's inestimable book on BISN Co - see elsewhere in this newsletter)



FROM THE BOX WORLD...

Are collapsible containers all they are cracked up to be?

Anyone who has spent time in shipping cannot be surprised at the mounting crisis affecting the container trades, a crisis described by one commentator as the 'curse of the empties'.

Imbalances of trade have been the bane of maritime business for decades, growing steadily worse as ships become more specialised, both by type and by physical characteristics such as dimensions. So it should be no surprise that container shipping is now a victim of the latest and severe imbalances of trade.

On the face of it, containers should be one of the most flexible units for transporting cargo, just as breakbulk ships were in earlier days. After all, cargo boxes are small, are portable and will accommodate a vast variety of cargo. But it is now clear their small size - compared to, say, a suezmax tanker or panamax bulk carrier - is no answer to uneven trade flows. Henry Boyd, a contributor to the online magazine Bow Wave, reported: "US port statistics show that for the past several years there has been a 2 to 1 ratio of import to export loads," and Europe has seen a similar imbalance.

So what can be the answer for the shipping industry? Waiting for structural changes in trade is not a viable position. While China booms today, causing huge imbalances between export and import volumes, other regions will be booming tomorrow with similar consequences

One of the biggest ideas just now is the collapsible container. If one could render a container to a third, say, or even a quarter of its original volume, there



would be clear space savings to be had in the shipment phases. At least one company - Cargoshell, in the Netherlands - is working on this idea.

The Cargoshell box is manufactured from composites (fibre reinforced plastics) and has a folding mechanism. The company claims the design makes the container lighter than the present

generation of steel boxes. While steel containers occupy the same amount of space whether they are fully loaded or when empty, "the volume of a folded Cargoshell is one-quarter of the original steel container", says the Dutch company.



Meanwhile in the US, research is being conducted into use of a polymer-based shell for the container body, the shell being suspended or supported in a steel frame forming the corner castings of the container. According to Henry Boyd, the material is recyclable. "That suggests the container would be as well. A



container constructed with a polymer shell and steel frame could be broken down, the shell ground into plastic pellets (the form needed for molding) and the pieces of several containers transported in a single box."

What should concern shippers and underwriters about manufacturers' claims for collapsible and recyclable boxes is the container's inherent strength. Forget for the moment containers in the maritime environment, and imagine the landward container depot where stacks can be up to six boxes high, even higher in some cases. That can represent a deadweight on the bottom box of some 120 tonnes or more; and perhaps 25% more if they were 40ft units.

Stowed underdeck, the same boxes can be in stacks seven high. Although they are supported in guides, the guides do little to reduce the static force bearing down on the lower tiers. What then the chances for the lowest boxes carried *above* deck - typically in stacks five or six high and often secured only by portable lashings? Familiar are the images of collapsed stacks of conventional steel boxes. But then imagine if any of the stack (let alone the bottom-most container) is made of something resembling the nose cone of a Formula 1 car.

Shipboard containers, especially those carried above deck, are subjected to enormous acceleration forces caused by ship motions, in addition to the static downward loads. The higher the stack, the greater the static and dynamic forces.

Next time the insurance broker pitches up at the underwriter's desk to get cover for two containers of rubber ducks, expect our prudent cargo underwriter to take a very hard look at manufacturers' claims for the strength of their boxes.





B-I

Menu

CALAVANCE CURRY (Mutchkotay)

This dish was served on 'NOWSHERA' for lunch in 1967 and probably many other BI vessels over the years. It has presented the biggest headache of all in finding the recipe. Thanks to Gordon McWilliam, the puzzle has been finally solved, cavalances are dried haricot or butter beans which BI vessels probably carried by the sackful in Butla's stores. It takes some overnight preparation but it's worth the effort for a tasty vegetarian curry.

Preparation Time: An overnight soak in cold water for the beans. plus 10 minutes for preparation.
Total Cooking Time: 25 to 30 minutes

Serves: 2/3

Ingredients

- 8 oz. (250g) Dried haricot or Butter beans
- 2 medium onions, 1 sliced, 1 minced or very finely chopped.
- 6-8 fresh mint leaves (Don't use the dried stuff)
- 2 oz (50g) ghee/cooking oil
- 1 clove of garlic, minced or crushed.
- 2 cloves
- 2 green cardamoms
- A 2 inch (5cm) stick of cinnamon
- Pepper & salt to taste and a squeeze of lemon or lime juice.

Method

Soak the dried beans overnight in cold water with the sliced onion and the mint leaves. when ready to start, boil the beans with the onion and mint until the beans are soft, drain and set aside. Gently fry the chopped/minced onion, garlic, cloves, cinnamon stick and cardamoms in the ghee/oil for 4 minutes until fragrant, add the cooked beans and simmer gently for 5 minutes. season with the pepper and salt and add the squeeze of lemon/lime just before serving

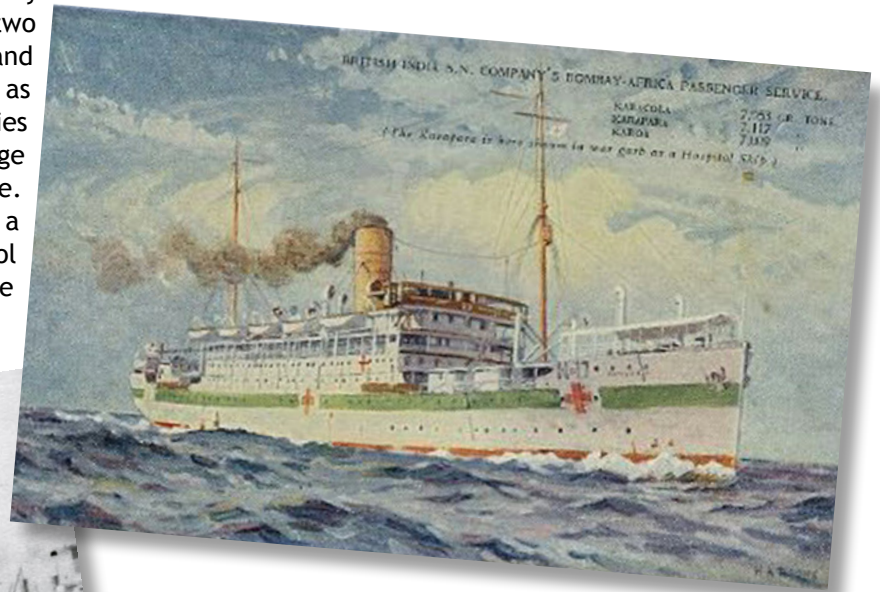
Serving

Serve with steamed or boiled long grain rice (Patna or Basmati), Mango and /or Lime pickle, Papadoms or a Chapatti and Sambals

Your Editor loved this one, but do ensure that it is not too runny. Thanks again to Mike Bowman for this. Happy eating!

FROM THE ARCHIVES...

We asked in our last issue whether any reader could identify the ship in the old B&W photograph sent in by Richard Henderson. He rather thought it was the old *Nevasa* in 1947. However, reader Roger Northcote is of the opinion that it may in fact be the *Karapara* (or one of her two sister ships, the *Karao* and *Karagola*) and supplied this copy of a watercolour as evidence. There are certainly similarities but the picture of the *Nevasa* in L&P page 114 tends to come down on Richard's side. Why she is dressed overall though remains a mystery. She was one of the first school cruise ships from 1935-1937, perhaps the picture is from that era. Any offers?



FROM THE AUCTION ROOMS...

Your editor has never been much noted for his financial acumen and prowess, as his bank manager and stockbroker will testify. However, things may be about to change. A copy of Laxon and Perry's encyclopaedic volume of our favourite shipping company has just been sold on eBay for the enormous sum of £215! Admittedly, it was probably in better condition than your

editor's bashed-about copy, but maybe his heirs and loved ones will read his Will with a bit more respect. Some 13 people were involved in the bidding, so there's a lot of unsatisfied demand out there.



FROM THE COMPETITIONS DEPT...

We asked you in our last issue whether any of you recognised either the place we were or any of the people in the photograph. The place seems to have stumped most of you but reader Paul Orwin in Brisbane recognises both Mombasa and himself holding the sheets [Er, for the non-mariners amongst us, apparently that's a technical term for 'rope' - Ed]. The young man almost baring his all next to the lady is Danny Wilson, whilst the cadet nearest the camera is Steve 'somebody'.

However, David Hammond (yes, he of the crew lists) opines that this cadet in the foreground is, in fact, Roger Holles. Roger is not (yet) a subscriber to this newsletter nor it would seem of the BI website, so as is your Editor's wont, he went trolling around the Internet to see if he could be found. There, on the pages of a Manchester-based acting agency is this photograph of a Roger Holles. Are we looking at the same person? David Hammond thinks that Roger went off to live in Spain. Can anyone supply some answers?

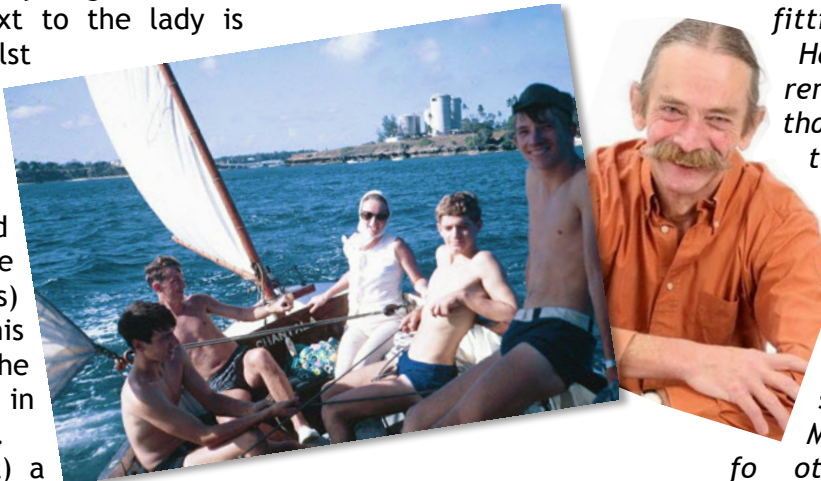
Meanwhile, Paul continues "this was about 40 years ago now, probably

October/November 1970 - the first trip on Chantala for us 3 cadets. There were 8 cadets that trip if I remember right [BI News for Dec 1, 1970 lists the following: Davies, Wilkinson, Wilson, Senior, Auld, Carney, Martin and Orwin - Ed]; Bertie Miller was our esteemed instructor with Ray Small...we got home on Christmas Eve that year - the next trip was Chantala's last in BI colours as we ended up in Hong Kong & Singapore and were then dispersed across the fleet when she was sold. I went to Kampala with deck cadet Bob Senior who was from Huddersfield. After that Bob & I joined the brand new Morvada finishing her fitting out at Sunderland.

Happy days indeed... if I remember right, it was on that same East African trip that some rogue-ish British India deck cadets were responsible for painting a derived name for the Clan Line cadetship Clan Sutherland across its stern one dark night in Mombasa after a rough football match between the

two Cadet contingents at the Seaman's Mission. The unauthorised renaming was easily noticed as Chantala sailed past when leaving the next morning to the amusement of all on the bridge and on forward stations. Mr Small playing detective soon identified the culprits (the paint under your fingernails gave it away, Boys) who paid the price for leaving Chantala without permission and unauthorised use of Company white paint ...pity I can't recall who the culprits were..."

It's about time your Editor draws a veil over this correspondence, lest others start raking up his past!



FROM THE CAPTIONS DEPT...

In our last issue, we asked you to have a little fun with this photograph. We had a few good entries ranging from the "Is that the RAC? Good, I need a hand, my car is in dock at the moment" from Chris Shelbourn to your Editor's favourite from marine engineer Simon Morgan "hello Chief, I was just cleaning the sea water inlet filter when ..."

Visions of the *Nowshera* in Genoa harbour all over again.

