

News of the BLSN 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...

What a brilliant lot you are! Thanks to you, we raised £425 for charity with the raffle for the *Matiana* jigsaw - and all the other wonderful prizes donated in the run-up to the draw at the BI Reunion in Newcastle (actually, it was Gateshead). Thanks to all the donors (too numerous to mention individually, but you know who you are!), but most of all, special thanks to all of you who bought tickets. The winner of the jigsaw was Mrs Sue Bowman, pictured here with husband Sandy. They are posing with one of their prized possessions, the *Sirdhana* bell. Sandy wrote to the directors of the company when she was scrapped to ask for the bell. His son (and subsequently his later children and grandchildren) was baptised using the bell as a font. If you don't ask, you don't get..!

There are a few more pictures of the reunion later in this issue and also of the Retired Engineers Association AGM and Lunch in Glasgow held in September. Thanks to David Mitchell for the photographs and report of this most convivial event.



It was a great pleasure for your editor to meet so many of our readers in Gateshead and he hopes to have the opportunity soon to meet some more when he travels to New Zealand in the New Year. It's been some 45 years or

so since he was last in New Zealand whilst sailing on the *Bankura* and he remembers the country with great affection.

Your editor is sure that it's not often that you can associate smuggling and the BI officer, but this happened, very loosely speaking, to him recently. He was passing through Eyemouth, a lovely little working fishing port in south east Scotland, where he encountered the Maritime Centre's [World of Boats](#), a superb exhibition of smuggling and much nautical ephemera, well worth a visit. One of the volunteer staff at the exhibition used to work for Blue Funnel, but on leaving that company, he joined the North Sea offshore business, where he met and worked with an ex-BI old hand, Joe MacWilliam. Joe used to regale him with stories of his time on *Dunera* amongst other ships. Apparently Joe is still in the offshore business, operating out of Singapore. Surprising how you get to hear of people, isn't it?

During the time of searching for suitable material for this little tome, your editor comes across some interesting odd bits and pieces, such as this little citation for the Royal Humane Society Bronze Medal:

*"Crosby, E.C. 2nd Officer B.I.S.N. Company's steamer Pachumba. Case 27492. At great personal risk, rescued a Lascar from drowning at Bhownugger, India, on the 15th*

*December 1894".* Don't suppose any of you have more information..?

Many thanks as always to all contributors to this issue of our newsletter - it wouldn't be the same without you!

## FROM THE 'TELL IT AS IT IS' DEPT ....

A pretty good line in invective comes from a Russian marine journalist, Mikhail Voytenko. Your editor has had cause over the years to call a spade a bloody shovel, but he bows the knee to Russian Mike. Read on....

*"Final question--who they are, those IMO, BIMCO, ITF, ICS, ISF and others? In all my years in maritime journalism I didn't ever see or read any criticism of any of them. Why? They don't need it, because they're perfection itself, they're already gods? You know, before all cases I got involved in, I hated only Russian*

*bureaucracy, now I hate international one no less than Russian. I hate their well-fed pinky cheeks and big bellies, I hate their empty, icy eyes, warming only when they see a profit. I was born and grew up in Soviet Union. One of the reasons Soviet regime fell, was total lack of any criticism. Criticism was a punishable misbehaviour with serious risk for critics. I don't know about any such risks in case of maritime bureaucracy, but I know for sure, for 100 pct, that any industry is steering to dangerous waters and to disaster, if leaders of this industry are above critics."*

You tell 'em, Mike! <http://tinyurl.com/y9prw4c>

To send in your views, notes, photos, brickbats or spare gold bars, please click on any "...callingBI" logo

## FROM THE LIBRARY SHELVES....

What a literary lot you are! In issue 14, we alerted you to John Brigg's book about his time at sea (see [www.shipsandseatales.com](http://www.shipsandseatales.com)) with BI. Now another Australian-based reader, Geoff Woodland, has written into "...calling BI" following our little piece on the historical naval fiction [website](#) in our last issue. Geoff says that one of his books is listed on that site. "*The Ice King*" has the backdrop of Liverpool's involvement in the slave trade as its theme. In 1804 Liverpool was the largest slave trading port in Great Britain, yet her influential traders felt threatened by the success, in Parliament, of the anti-slavery movement. Few, in Liverpool, condemned the 'Trade', but William King, son of a Liverpool slave trader, sickened by what he experienced aboard a Spanish slaver, was one of the few who did speak out against the Trade.

This epic, during the dying days of this despicable practice, has generational change, moral wickedness, greed, romance and the fortunes of war woven through

the lives of father and son caught up in the turmoil that preceded the implementation of the British Trade Act of 1807, which would end Britain's involvement in the slave trade. To Liverpool slave traders, if this Act gained Royal Assent, it could mean their ruin.

Mixing history with imagination, Geoff Woodland has recreated Liverpool of those turbulent times. Geoff's website, [geoffwoodland.com](http://geoffwoodland.com), has further details - just click on the symbols on the sword. 'Ice King' is listed with Amazon, Book Depository, Barnes & Noble etc. Geoff says that "if any member wishes a copy, I can arrange a small discount if they come through me - currently it is selling at £14.50, so through me it would be AUS \$17.00 (around £10.00) or the e-book version is £5.99 through Amazon. Sadly this discounted offer is only available to UK-based readers".

Contact Geoff via [woodlandagency@bigpond.com](mailto:woodlandagency@bigpond.com). It all makes your Editor's paltry scribbblings look most mediocre.



## FROM THE SUBSCRIPTION DEPT....

Our Girl Friday has taken time out from texting her boyfriend or whatever it is that she does in the back room to say that we have been getting bounced emails from the following subscribers: Anthony Henley, UK; Peter Dixon, Australia; Livin Prabhu in USA. If any reader has news or contact with these, could you kindly let Tracy know so that she can keep her records straight, please?

In the meantime, we warmly welcome the following subscribers who have swelled our ranks over the last few months: Michael Flood, UK; Rens Oosterom, The Netherlands; Tony George, New Zealand; Philip Paice, Australia; Keith Walker, UK; Michael Brand, England; Peter Walsh, Australia; Mike Ousby, UK; James Lynch, Australia; Mestiyage Goonatilaka, UK; Barry Fleetwood, UK; and Alan Pescott, Australia. You are amongst friends, gentlemen.

## FROM THE COMPETITION DEPT....

Our last "where are we now?" competition awoke warm memories from several readers, amongst



them John Prescott, the above mentioned Geoff Woodland and Mike Pratt. Mike had a particular reason for recognising Penang from the photograph. He says "back in

1955 I was 3/0 on *Santhia* with Frank Bell C/O and whilst in Penang, I was detailed to do some lifeboat training for a few engineers and crew whilst we were at anchor. I remember it well as in my normal manner I used to swing like Tarzan down on one of the life lines to descend into the lifeboat beneath, the lines being attached to the davits for this purpose. Unfortunately, the wire spans connected to the davits parted just as I was swinging across from the boatdeck and I made a spectacular entry into the harbour. I was hauled in by one of the engineers at the stern of the boat where I surfaced. It was fortunate for me that the span snapped on my outswing as I think I might have been seriously

damaged otherwise. I soon dried out with the strong Penang sunshine and continued with my lifeboat instructions". Yup, Mike deserves the prize, methinks!



In the meantime, we thank Ted Treacher for this slightly harder view taken in 1963, we think. Where are we now? Answers to [...calling BI](#)





## FROM THE BI WEBSITE ....

Way back in December last year, reader Peter Fielding recalled the time he spent on the *Camelot*, an ex-Ben Line heavylift ship, managed by BI for the Ministry of Transport between 1965 -1968.

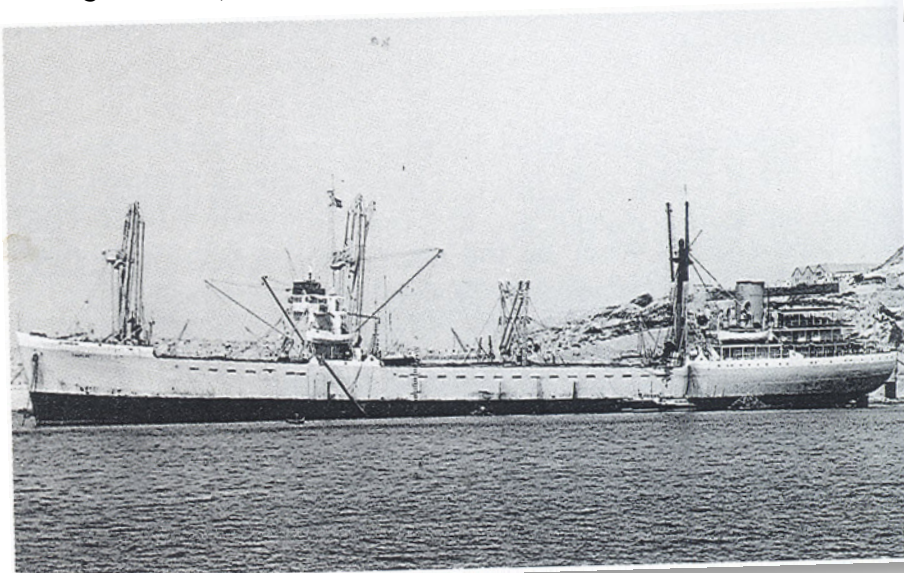
He wrote "I joined "*Camelot*" in Southampton in October '68, on her return from the Pacific with a group of scientists from Aldermaston, who had been observing the French nuclear tests being carried out there. Shortly after arriving on board, we sailed down

the Solent and anchored off the Isle of Wight, while the boffins checked the calibration of their instruments in clear, uncontaminated air. Needless to say, after several months bobbing around the Pacific, there was no alcohol or cigarettes left on board, so we

dropped a lifeboat and went into Ryde to stock up at the nearest off-licence. When the boys at Aldermaston had finished what they had to do, we went back up to Marchwood, and landed them and their equipment, which was installed in containers on deck. We then laid the ship up alongside the jetty at Husband's Shipyard. Incidentally, on the other side of the jetty was "*Shemara*", Lady Docker's yacht, which was for sale. I made the acquaintance of the electrician, who was the

only person living aboard, and was shown around. I didn't make an offer, though!

A useful feature of being berthed where we were was that there was a pub, the Ship Inn, at the landward end of the jetty. Before going down there, whoever was day-aboard would plug in a leadlight and clip it onto the rails at the top of the gangway. From the pub window the ship was in full view. If smoke was coming out of the funnel, the boiler was on, if the leadlight was on, the generator was running!



I arranged to go home for a few days over Christmas, and while visiting some friends, one asked what was the name of the ship I was on. When I told him "*Camelot*", he said "It's been on the news on television. It caught fire on Christmas Day!" Naturally, I dismissed this as a

wind-up, until I got back. The first thing I saw when I got out of the taxi at the bottom of the gangway was a pile of burnt bedding and cabin furniture. Apparently the cook had taken to his bunk, well refreshed, on Christmas Day and fallen asleep whilst smoking."

Just think, this was the ship that the UK sent to monitor the French nuclear tests in the Pacific! Just as well they weren't allowed to light the blue touch paper!

## FROM THE TALL SHIPS ....

Aussie readers had a treat this month - four tall ships starred at the Classic & Wooden Boat Festival at the Australian Maritime Museum in Darling Harbour, 16th-17th October. They were the *Endeavour*, the three-masted replica of Cook's ship of discovery; *James Craig*, the restored 19th-century barque; *Soren Larsen*, a 20th-century brigantine and *Southern Swan*, an 1850s-style barquentine.



The *Endeavour* was launched in 1989, and her skipper for many years was BI's own Chris Blake.



# B-I

## Menu

Egg and Pea Curry  
In BI galleys this was probably made with reconstituted dried peas in those days, but frozen ones work well and the egg quality has improved dramatically too (remembering some disastrous BI Eggs to Order at breakfast) It's a relatively quick, simple and tasty dish.

### INGREDIENTS

4 Tablespoons of veggie oil (Peanut/Canola, don't use olive oil)  
200 gram tin of diced or chopped tomatoes or the same quantity of fresh tomatoes, chopped up, with their juice.  
1 tablespoon of Tomato puree/paste  
100 grams thawed uncooked frozen peas  
6-8 hardboiled eggs ( 2 Eggs per Sahib)  
200 grams of thinly sliced onion  
Fresh Coriander leaves, rough chopped (about 1/2 to 3/4 of a supermarket bunch) Only chop up the leaves in one direction, that's what the gurus say!

### MASALA/SPICES

1 teaspoon tumeric powder  
1 teaspoon ground coriander  
1/2 teaspoon chilli powder  
1 teaspoon garam masala mix  
1 teaspoon ground cumin

### METHOD

In 1 tablespoon of the oil, fry up the sliced onion until golden, not brown drain, set aside.  
Make vertical deep cuts into the shelled eggs (about 5-6 cuts per egg), it lets the spices in, (if you halve the eggs the yolks tend to fall out.  
Mix the spices into a paste with a little water, not too thick.  
Heat the remaining oil (3 tablespoons) in a medium size frying pan/wok, add the spice paste and gently fry for half a minute until fragrant but not singed!. Add 1/4 cup water to the pan, then the fried onions, the tomatoes and their juice plus the tomato puree/paste, stir it all up.  
Add the thawed peas and the chopped coriander leaves to the mix and simmer for about 4 minutes until it thickens.  
Add salt to taste -if the Memsahib permits!  
Add the hardboiled eggs and simmer gently, covered, until the eggs are hot and well soaked in the gravy. Serve asap.

Serves 3-4 with plain boiled rice and a pickle and a pappadom or two

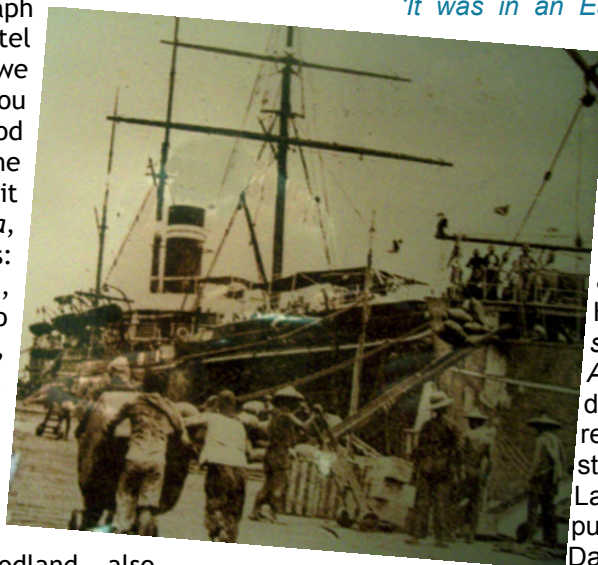
It's been a while since we featured one of Mike Bowman's BI curry recipes, so here's a cracker - a favourite of your Editor's. This particular version was served up on the good ship *Orna* for lunch on 21st September 1965 (as an alternative to Steak & Kidney Pudding or Corned Tongue/Garlic Sausage)!



## FROM THE ARCHIVES ....

In our last issue, we asked if any reader could identify the BI ship in a photograph spotted in a Singapore hotel by Mike Bellamy. At first we thought we had you stumped. Then GOD (Good Old David) came to the rescue. He ventures that it may just be the *Manora*, 1884-1907. The clues: three stepped masts, foremast yards, gaffs to main and mizzen masts, three boats, flush deck, bridge set back from the deck house, a chunkier funnel than other three masted single funnel BI ships of that era.

Our friend Geoff Woodland also weighed in with "I recognised the picture from a book I



have - 'An Eastern Port' by Julian Davison (ISBN 981-05-0672-4). The author doesn't give the name of the ship, but does quote Joseph Conrad below the picture -

*'It was in an Eastern port. She was an Eastern ship, inasmuch as then she belonged to that port. She traded among the dark islands on a blue reef-scarred sea . . '* from *The Shadow Line*, (1917).

Julian Davison wrote two books of his time when he lived in Singapore as a child (but schooled in England) in the 50's & 60's.

His first was 'One for the Road & other stories' (ISBN 981-04-4791-4) followed by *An Eastern Port*. Each chapter is a different story of Malaya & Singapore. He recalls sailing & flying out to Singapore and stopping in Ceylon and visits to the Mount Lavinia Hotel. The memories were first published in the Singapore *Expat* magazine. Davison is also well known for his books on Balinese Architecture".



## FROM THE READERS...

A couple of issues ago, you may remember that we introduced Mrs Rachael MacBean, a gracious lady married to a Eastern Service BI Officer, Elgin MacBean. We sent Rachael a copy of that issue and it provoked this wonderful reply from her: *"I got goosepimples when I read through the newsletter - everything felt as lifelike as it happened so many happy years ago! I never forget the "whiteness" of those decks, and tangy smell of the*

*sea, with the seagulls sweeping down to grab the crumbs (used to save all my cabin biscuits to feed them!), the moonlit nights with the crests of waves sparkling like diamonds, and my first glimpse of the Shwe Dagong Pagoda pointing its golden finger to the sky as we sailed into Rangoon (now Yangon). Yangon, by the way means "beyond danger" in Pali and I named my own house (bought ten years ago) "Yangon" since the name held a special sentiment for me and it also meant my being "beyond danger" and free (at last) from nagging landlords in rented accommodation! Best memories"*

## FROM THE MEMORY BANKS...

It seems a millennium ago (actually, only issue 7 - let's not go over the top - Ed) that we asked if anyone could identify these happy matelots from the Merkara. The photo was sent in by Chris Shelbourne. Now your Editor has discovered a little note tucked away on a website from [stuart612673](#) who says *"Ok, I recognise Alan Hillier 4/E/O, Terry Beaver 4/E/O, John Patrick 3/E/O, Chris Shelbourne 3/O and Jonathan Shiner cadet... not sure if it is me in the hat!!!"* If anyone can verify these or add others, we would dearly like to hear from you.





## FROM THE REUNIONS (1)....



British India Engineer Officers' Association

Annual Luncheon, Glasgow, 16th September 2010

Membership of the Association stands at 274 and sixty five of these attended the annual luncheon at the Ramada Glasgow City Hotel. Overseas guests were Jack Grieve from Baltimore, USA, Peter Davison and Richard Wright from Victoria, Australia, and Alex McAuley from New Zealand. Attending for the first time were Bob Lawrence, Andy Monks and Mike Ousby. The Association will meet again at the same venue on Thursday **15th September 2011** and details will be circulated by the Secretary, James Slater prior to the event.





## FROM THE REUNIONS (2)....



It was a grand do! Rumours that your Editor disgraced himself again were surely wide of the mark. Certainly his best sales pitch voice was in evidence for the



*Matiana* jigsaw raffle, as explained earlier in this newsletter. Some 160 souls sat down to a fine dinner on the Friday evening, thence retiring to the bar and other pursuits - which may just explain the lower-than-expected rollcall at breakfast the next morning! Saturday morning saw a doughty band saunter across the river lead by that master of shore excursions, John King, towards the Newcastle Trinity House by

a somewhat circuitous route. We were warmly

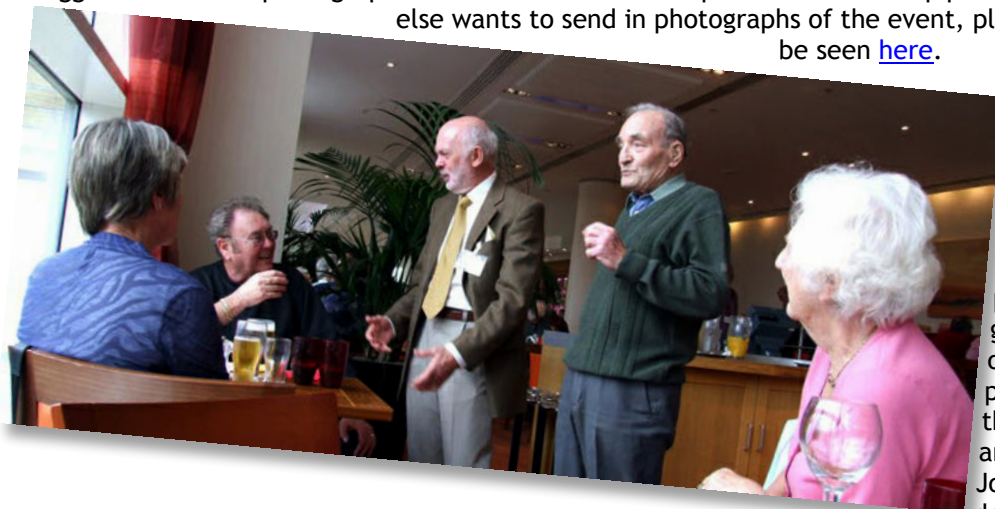
welcomed by the Master and Deputy Master (just as well, given the keen north wind at the river front!). [Trinity House Newcastle](#) (click here for its website) is a separate entity to its London and Hull equivalents and has its origins around 1505. The Master, Captain R C Shipley sailed in Trident Tankers, so had some knowledge of BISN. The buildings were redolent with history as can be imagined in such a venerable organisation and even comes with a resident ghost (which fortunately is a benevolent and friendly one apparently!).

On the afternoon, most of the BI crowd played at being seamen again, embarking on a trip down the River Tyne, past the sites of many old shipyards with a long and proud BI ship building and docking record. These days, of course, that is all now history, but it was good to see the efforts being made to re-generate the area. Most of the hardy crew braved the cool weather to breathe in the salt air (as the photos on the next page show), but it must be said that the hot buffet was very welcome! Unknown to many of the BI crew, the skipper of the river cruiser was also ex-BI, one Colin Chandler. Colin was, believe it or not, also unaware of the BISN connection, only



finding out as we disembarked! He was overcome with nostalgia to be invited to the Sunday curry lunch, which was heartily enjoyed by all. Your Editor was espied sporting an Allsops Lager T-shirt for the occasion, presented to him by an old friend and fellow imbibor of the stuff, Roger Northcote. Thanks, Roger! It looks even better on a woman, as can be seen on the next page (and no, before you ask, that isn't Tracey, our erstwhile typing pool denizen. *She* is most sniffy at the moment, having not being allowed to go to the reunion. A blessed peace has descended on the offices of "...calling BI", without the nasal moanings of that poor soul).

A bigger selection of photographs of the reunion has been posted on the BIsip photos website, click [here](#). If anybody else wants to send in photographs of the event, please do. A list of participants can be seen [here](#).



Another hugely enjoyable weekend, meeting old friends and new; the biggest enjoyment was watching the lines of worry slowly lift from the face of our organiser, Sue Spence, as she realised that all **was** going to plan, that people **were** having a good time and all the hard work in organising this big event was paying off! We owe a huge debt of thanks to Sue and husband John for the dedication she has shown over





## FROM THE REUNIONS (3)....



the years in organising these eleven reunions. Sue confided that she may have just one more try in two years time, but "that will definitely be my last". Thanks a million for all of them, Sue!

